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- JIMMY ARMFIELD RIP
- LIBERTADORES CUP PREVIEW
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Contents

March 2018

FEATURES

24 Eyewitness
Morocco

30 Special Report
Next generation coaches

48 Player Biography
Isco

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 **In pictures**
10 **From the Editor**
12 **Keir Radnedge** no escape from VAR
15 **On the radar** Ayoub El Kaabi
16 **Jonathan Wilson** soft defences
18 **Jimmy Armfield**
19 **Ins & outs** people on the move
20 **Brian Glanville** confusion at Anfield

FACE TO FACE

44 **Bernardo Silva**

TALENT SCOUT

54 **Ligue 1 prospects**

6 OF THE BEST

56 **January transfers**

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

58 **Phil Neville's appointment**

ARCHIVE

60 **March 1986**

RIVALS

82 **Al Ahly & Zamalek**

19

44

56

58

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See page 8

World Service

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

68
64 **USA** MLS season preview
68 **Libertadores Cup** group stage
71 **Asia** Champions League kicks off
72 **Japan** Grampus make headlines
74 **Republic of Ireland** Cork eye title
76 **Scotland** SFA chief exec steps down

PLUS 70 Global diary 78 ESM XI 79 Results, tables, fixtures 80 Squads

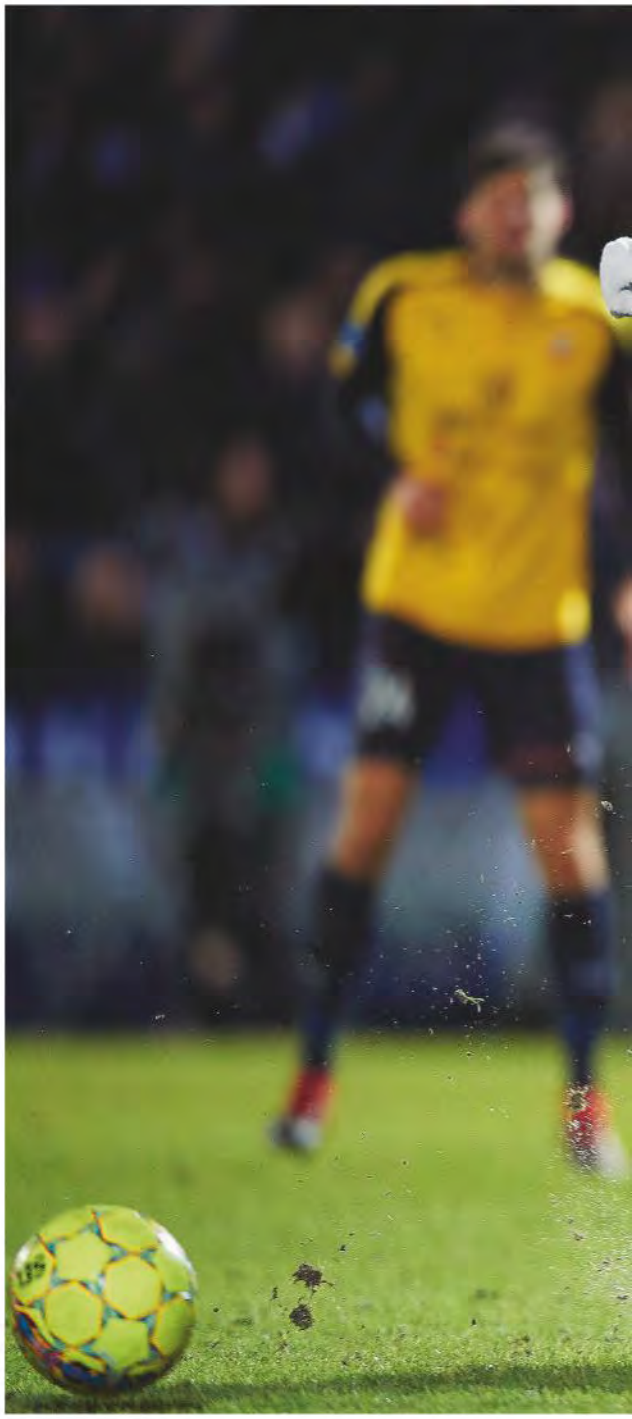
In Pictures

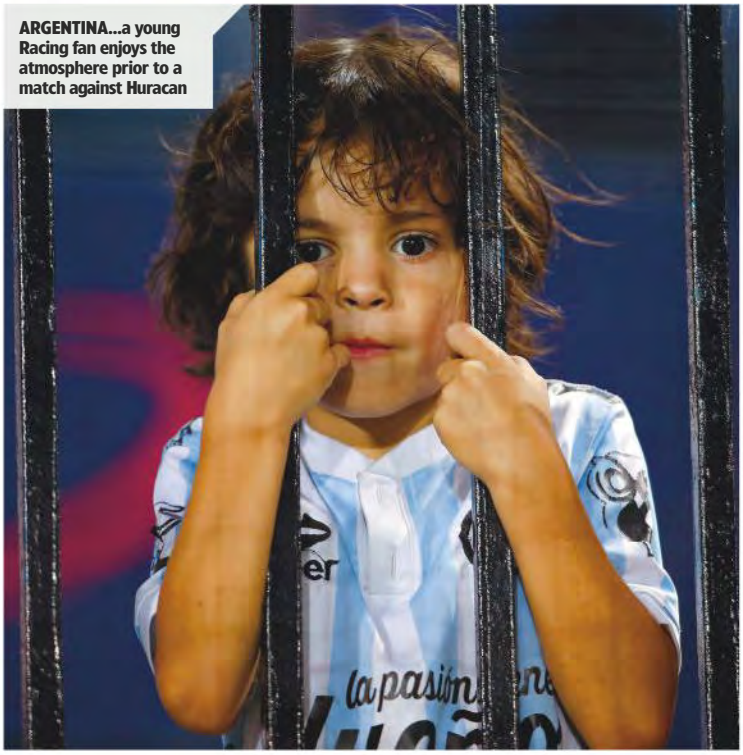
The global game caught on camera

VENEZUELA...the national guard protect Uruguayan referee Daniel Fedorczuk as he leaves the pitch during the Libertadores Cup game between Deportivo Tachira and Santa Fe of Colombia at the Estadio Polideportivo de Pueblo Nuevo

GERMANY...a Manchester United supporter pays his respects at the site of the plane crash on the 60th anniversary of the Munich air disaster

HOLLAND...Thierry Ambrose of NAC Breda celebrates with fans at the Rat Verlegh Stadion





ARGENTINA...a young Racing fan enjoys the atmosphere prior to a match against Huracan

VIETNAM...thousands of Vietnamese fans pour into Hanoi's city centre to celebrate an unexpected silver medal at the AFC Under-23 championship

MEXICO... Cruz Azul's Carlos Pena (right) competes with Osvaldo Gonzalez of Toluca

DENMARK...AGF's Martin Spelmann is crowded out by Edgar Babayan (left) and Bjorn Kopplin of Hobro

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FROM THE EDITOR

It is easy to overestimate the importance of managers and coaches in football. They get too much praise when they are successful and they are the first to be blamed when things go wrong. Players, meanwhile, are the individuals that really matter.

However, there is no denying the impact that a new coach can have on a struggling side, nor the effect of a strong personality on a group of players.

This month we turn the spotlight on some of the coaches who have made a difference to their respective teams over the past 12 months. The 25 selected (page 30) share some characteristics but there are crucial differences. Not all are young; Napoli's Maurizio Sarri is an overnight sensation at the age of 59. Others have struggled of late; Sunday Oliseh falling out of favour at Fortuna Sittard.

> There is no denying the impact that a new coach can have on a struggling side

But they all have the potential to move on to bigger and better things. It's unlikely that this is the last time they will feature in these pages.

Next month, our attention turns back to the players with the publication of the World Soccer 500 – our list of the most important players in the world game.

See you then.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 VAR goes to IFAB board meeting p12
2 Morocco launches 2026 World Cup bid p24
3 Jimmy Armfield dies p18
4 MLS season set to kick off p64
5 Saudis agree La Liga deal p10
6 Phil Neville appointed England women's coach p58
7 Brazilian clubs favourites to win Libertadores p68
8 J.League gets under way p72
9 Regan leaves Scottish FA p76
10 Koeman appointed Holland coach p19

SPAIN

Saudis move to La Liga in ground-breaking deal

Nine Saudi Arabian players have joined seven different Spanish clubs on loan deals in a bid to gain European club experience ahead of this summer's World Cup finals.

From Saudi Arabia's successful qualifying campaign, Yahya Al Shehri (27) has joined Leganes, Fahad Al Muwallad (23) is at Levante and Salem Al Dawsari (26) signed for Villarreal.

Jaber Issa joined Villarreal B, while Marwan Othman headed to Leganes' youth team. Segunda Division clubs also took Saudi players, with Nooh Al Mousa moving to Real Valladolid, Abdulmajeed Al Sulayhi joining Rayo Vallecano, Ali Al Namer signing for Numancia and Abdullah Al Hamdan now at Sporting Gijon.

The deals were the result of a partnership between La Liga, the General Sports Authority of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation, with Saudi authorities paying all the related costs.

"These loan agreements, for an initial period of six months, allow these players to further develop their skills training and playing in Spain," said a statement from La Liga. "The incorporation of players from Saudi Arabia in the Spanish clubs follows a rigorous scouting programme

Hopeful...Yahya Al Shehri

"No, I wouldn't like to see Neymar in the white shirt of Madrid"

Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy (right) "advises" Real president Florentino Perez not to sign the ex-Barcelona star from Paris Saint-Germain this summer

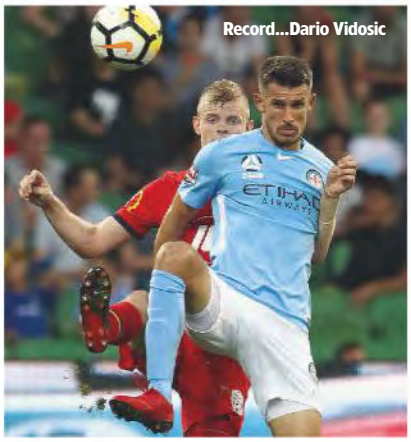
that spanned multiple months to identify the best talent."

However, the Spanish players' union, the AFE, hit out at the deals, saying the moves sacrificed "the essence of this sport". A statement from the AFE read: "This new business model prioritises the economic aspect over the sporting one. This agreement impedes the development of young footballers and represents an obstacle to the opportunities for the youth academy, which isn't always accorded this type of opportunity."

In the finals for the first time since 2006, Saudi Arabia will play hosts Russia in the opening game of the 2018 tournament.

Optimistic ...Salem Al Dawsari

HEROES & VILLAINS



Record...Dario Vidosic

DARIO VIDOSIC

His goal in Melbourne City's 5-0 victory over Adelaide United made him the first player to score for five A-League clubs, having previously found the target for Queensland Roar, Adelaide United, Western Sydney Wanderers and Wellington Phoenix.

MARCUS McGUANE

The 19-year-old became the latest English prospect to leave the Premier League to seek his fortune abroad. His moved from Arsenal to Barcelona B, follows in the footsteps of such talents as Borussia Dortmund's Jadon Sancho, who joined from Manchester City.

HARRY KANE

The Tottenham striker went top of the ESM Golden Shoe rankings with the winning goal in the North London derby against Arsenal.

Rejuvenated...Swansea City boss Carlos Carvalhal

CARLOS CARVALHAL

Since arriving in January, the Portuguese manager has worked wonders in steering Swansea City away from the Premier League relegation zone...for now.

FABIO LUCIONI

The skipper of Serie A strugglers Benevento, did little to help his side's battle against a return to the second tier when he failed a drugs test and received a one-year ban.

Ban...Fabio Lucioni

NACIONAL FANS

During a Libertadores Cup game away to Brazilian club Chapecoense, some supporters of the Uruguayan side taunted their hosts about the plane crash which killed 19 of their players and staff in 2016. Nacional apologised after the game. which they won 1-0, calling the incident "horrendous" and saying that it brought a "deep sense of shame".

TONY HENRY

West Ham's director of recruitment was fired for "unacceptable comments" that some African players "have a bad attitude" and "cause mayhem" when not in the team.

Card...Rainville and Balotelli

NICOLAS RAINVILLE

The French referee decided to caution Nice striker Mario Balotelli after the 27-year-old Italian complained to him about racist abuse from Dijon fans during a Ligue 1 match.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

No escape from VAR

To VAR or not to VAR? That is the question facing the game's lawmakers when IFAB sits down in Zurich at the start of March to deliberate on two years' worth of worldwide trials.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has been insisting that VAR will play a vital role at the World Cup finals in Russia this summer. Naturally, teething problems were inevitable and this is why trials have been approved around the world.

However, those trials have proved – in major domestic competitions and with some of the game's most experienced referees in Germany, Italy and lately England – that much more work is needed.

Ideally, issues regarding consistency in application, time lag and – most importantly – communication to players, officials and spectators should all be granted more time and consideration. Without this, the obvious risk is that repeated VAR controversies could overshadow the football at the World Cup – especially as many of the referees will not have experienced its use at high-pressure elite level.

But this then begs the question: should the World Cup be a laboratory for theoreticians?

This is important for FIFA in financial terms, never mind abstract concepts such as fair play and credibility.

The World Cup generates more than 90 per cent of all FIFA's income; hence keeping the money machine well oiled is crucial to not only FIFA but also to the majority of small and medium-size member associations which depend on its development largesse.

In January, IFAB's preparatory business meeting refrained from recommending the annual meeting approve VAR for use worldwide. Instead, it merely approved updated and refined instructions for both on-pitch and off-pitch referees. This was hardly a gesture of confidence despite a "thorough...positive and encouraging" application in more than 800 competitive matches around the world.

Belgian view... VAR has been trialled extensively throughout Europe

The stated objective of VAR is not to achieve 100 per cent accuracy but "to correct 'clear and obvious errors' and deal with 'serious missed incidents' in defined match-changing situations (goal, penalty/no penalty, direct red card and mistaken identity for disciplinary sanctions)".

> Many referees will not have experienced VAR at elite level...should the World Cup be a laboratory for theoreticians?

A consensus within the game appears content with this, even if a remarkable number of media analysts appear ignorant of the terms and conditions. So, IFAB faces a choice which is no choice.

IFAB comprises the four British home nations and FIFA. England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have one vote each and FIFA has four. A positive decision in March would need a minimum of six votes, though it is customary to seek a consensus ahead of a vote. Infantino will not retreat on VAR. Hence responsibility for saying yes or no rests with the home nations. In individual terms this means their chief executives: Martin Glenn (England), Patrick Nelson (Northern Ireland), Jonathan Ford (Wales) and interim Scotland FA CEO Andrew McKinlay.

Logic suggests that, while IFAB harbours some doubts pending further development, the horse has bolted.

FIFA has already applied VAR at tournaments such as the Club World Cup and the Confederations Cup in Russia last summer.

The least IFAB may do is approve further experimentation which will clear FIFA to make its own decision about the World Cup, while hoping that those teething troubles can be sorted out before Russia and Saudi Arabia meet on June 14 in the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow. WS

2026 vote is a two-horse race

Who will host the 2026 World Cup is a two-horse race between Morocco and United 2026 (comprising Canada, Mexico and the USA).

The system has been changed. No longer is it up to FIFA Council – this time the decision is set for June 13 among the full FIFA Congress after technical evaluations and a review by council the previous day. All 207 "other" member associations can vote in a ballot which, for the first time, will be open to view.

United 2026 has always been the clear favourite after Canada and Mexico agreed to drop notions of individual bids and join with the US, which would assume the role of "senior partner".

It is thought that FIFA president Gianni Infantino would prefer United 2026 for the following reasons:

• The need for a "safe hands" World Cup after the hostings in two successive contentious venues in Russia and Qatar.

• Greater confidence in the organisational, administrative, contractual and financial potential of a US-led hosting;

• The danger of upsetting US authorities yet again after their shock failure to win 2022, with a suspicion that this played a role in prompting a DoJ investigation into FIFA;

• The agreement already in place with Fox for broadcasting rights.

Of course, Infantino may also feel he "owes" United bid leader Sunil Gulati for playing a crucial role in seeing him elected in spring 2016.

However, a quick review of the numbers at play suggests Morocco may sit much closer within striking distance than popular opinion suggests:

• Africa (54 members): largely solid for "home" preference Morocco;

• Asia (46 members): mixed, although much may depend on the preference of Kuwait's Olympic powerbroker Sheikh Ahmad Al Fahad Al Sabah. A US-led bid should get support from Japan and South Korea but many Arab states will lean towards Morocco;

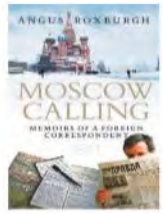
• CONCACAF (35 members): largely solid for United 2026 as fellow CONCACAF members, with similar timelines for television and hence advertising, sponsorship, etc – and despite US president Donald Trump's provocative fulminations;

• Oceania (11 members): already understood informally to have committed its votes to United 2026;

• South America (10 members): solid for United 2026 through excellent relations with Mexico; also a similar timeline for television and hence advertising, sponsorship, etc;

• UEFA (55 members): could be split one-third/two-thirds with the Mediterranean nations plus Russia and its "influenced neighbours" not willing to support a US-centric bid bearing in mind the doping scandal animosity.

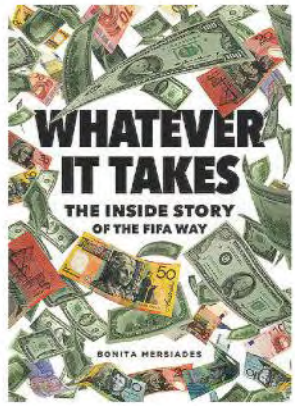
The above would result in a 113-94 victory for United 2026 – which is much closer than many forecast.



Recommended reading

Anyone planning on heading to Russia for the World Cup should read *Moscow Calling: Memoirs of a Foreign Correspondent* in which Angus Roxburgh, former Moscow correspondent of *The Sunday Times* and the BBC provides a unique insight into the heart and soul of the finals host (Birlinn, £17.99).

For a similarly unique view on the skulduggery of the 2018-2022 World Cup bidding campaign there is Bonita Mersiades' long-awaited *Whatever It Takes: The Inside Story of the FIFA Way* (PowerhousePress, US$20).



Mersiades was head of communications for the vain Australian bid for 2022 – until she was sacked 10 months before the vote after falling out with her bosses over their flawed strategy and its inevitable failure.

Joint bid...(from left) Victor Montagliani (Canada), Sunil Gulati (USA) and Decio De Maria (Mexico)

"I should never have gone to Las Palmas. When I said yes I didn't even know that the team was on an island"

After returning to Saint-Etienne, Tunisia international Oussama Tannane reflects on his loan spell in La Liga

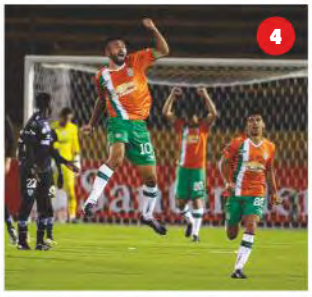
GOALS we'd like to see again

1 HIRVING LOZANO
PSV v Excelsior
A well-worked team goal that includes a delightful assist from Luuk De Jong.

2 CHRISTIAN LUYINDAMA
Standard Liege v Anderlecht
A spectacular overhead kick from the edge of the penalty area.

3 GIOVANNI LO CELSO
Paris Saint-Germain v Lille
Makes room for himself then dinks the ball over the keeper from the edge of the penalty area.

4 JESUS DATOLO
Banfield v Independiente Del Valle
A thunderbolt of a free-kick from 40 yards out that flies into the far top corner.



5 STOICO
Linense v Lorca
Chips the ball over an opponent before running half the length of the pitch and curling a right-foot shot beyond the Lorca keeper in a game in the Spanish third tier.

6 IGNACIO SCOCCO
River Plate v Olimpo
Brilliant solo goal, dribbling past five players before rounding the goalkeeper to score.

WINNERS

MARSEILLE
Thrashed Bourg-en-Bresse 9-0 in the French Cup to record their biggest victory in any competition for 70 years.

MOROCCO
Became the first host country to win the African Nations Championship, beating Nigeria 4-0 in the Final.

CARLOS CORDEIRO
Beat the pre-election favourite Kathy Carter to succeed Sunil Gulati as US federation president.

FOUSSENY COULIBALY
Having opted to play for Tunisia, the Ivory Coast-born midfielder was told he will not be picked.

HOPE SOLO
The former USA women's keeper received just 1.1 per cent of the final vote in the USSF presidential election.

RIYAD MAHREZ
The Algerian winger skipped training after Leicester refused to sell him to Manchester City in January.

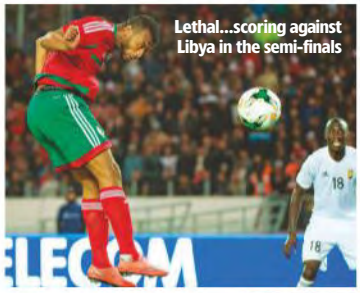
LOSERS

"Welcome to Manchester, Alexis, Atom and Humber"

A Manchester United fans' banner welcomes new signing Alexis Sanchez – and his pet dogs

Picture: BF/REX/Shutterstock

Ayoub EL KAABI (RS Berkane)


Lethal...scoring against Libya in the semi-finals

The star of the recent African Nations Championship, Morocco's 24-year-old striker was the finals' top scorer, with his nine goals almost doubling the previous record for the tournament for African-based players.

As well as scoring in the Final, he also twice hit the woodwork with overhead kicks as the hosts beat Nigeria 4-0. Voted player of the competition, his goal haul included a hat-trick against Guinea and a double against Libya in the semi-finals.

Abel Majid Madrane, the president of El Kaabi's club Berkane, claimed in Moroccan newspaper *Assabah* that Atletico Madrid had made enquiries about taking the player to Spain.

El Kaabi's form at the tournament also increased speculation that he will be called into the Morocco squad ahead of this summer's World Cup.

UMUT BOZOK (Nimes)
The 21-year-old striker of French/Turkish descent has been on fire for Ligue 2 side Nimes, where he has been likened to Olivier Giroud, and was voted the second division player of the year for 2017.

IHLAS BEBOU (Hanover)
The 23-year-old Togolese centre-forward has burst onto the Bundesliga scene this season, with his speed and goals a big part in his side's attempts to re-establish themselves back in the top flight.

INAKI WILLIAMS (Athletic Bilbao)
The 23-year-old forward, born in Bilbao to Liberian parents, scored a wonder goal against Eibar and agreed a new contract with Athletic that runs until 2025 and has a buyout clause of £100m.

BALLOU TABLA (Barcelona)
The 18-year-old midfielder joined Barca's B squad from MLS side Montreal Impact on an initial three-year deal and immediately had his buy-out clause set at €25m.

JOHN VAN'T SCHIP (PEC Zwolle)
The former Ajax and Holland winger has pulled off a miracle in taking PEC Zwolle into the Eredivisie top four.

MOHAMMED NUR
(El Kanemi Warriors)
Aged just 15, the playmaker appeared as a substitute for Nigeria in the African Nations Championship against Rwanda. "For me, this player is the future of Nigeria. He will be a star in a few years," says national coach Salisu Yusuf.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Have top clubs given up on the art of defending?

Liverpool's Premier League fixture against Manchester City at Anfield in January presented an apparent paradox. The hosts went into the game with the best home defensive record in the league, conceding just four goals in 11 games, while City had the best away defensive record, with five goals in 11 games. Yet when the match finished 4-3, nobody was remotely surprised.

This is simply the nature of modern football. There are a handful of examples of top clubs who adopt a different approach – most notably Jose Mourinho at Manchester United and Diego Simeone at Atletico Madrid – but the majority of elite sides play a style that focuses on defending by position rather than by the more traditional arts of marking and winning headers and tackles. And that means when they come under pressure they are vulnerable.

That's why in the Premier League this season, meetings between the top six have tended to be raucously exciting. It's also why there has been an increase in victories by a large margin in the latter stages of European competition.

As football's rich have got richer, they have come to dominate their domestic leagues to a greater degree. Matches often become an exercise in attack against defence – which is increasingly the case even in the Premier League, which prides itself on the supposed fact that any side can beat any other side.

In the first three seasons that Opta collected data, between 2003-04 and 2005-06, there were only three Premier League games in which one team had 70 per cent or more of the ball. That figure rose gradually to 36 in 2016-17 – a tally that had been surpassed this season by January 1.

Finish...Mohamed Salah (right) scores Liverpool's fourth goal against City

That raises questions about the spectacle of big clubs becoming too dominant and rendering their domestic leagues less attractive. And it also affects how games are played when two members of the elite meet.

> In the Premier League this season, meetings between the top six have tended to be raucously exciting

Thrilling as last season's games between Paris Saint-Germain and Barcelona were, for instance, there is a long period of football history from, say, the early 1960s to the beginning of the decade, when such a tie would have been unthinkable. Gifted sides wouldn't have capitulated as first Barca and then PSG did, because they were used to defending and conditioned to battle.

That's not quite what was going on in that Liverpool-City game, though. Rather that was a consequence of two teams who both place an emphasis on playing high up the pitch and keeping the shape compact – which inevitably means leaving space behind the back four. If the back four is drawn deeper, then there is insufficient protection and they are vulnerable to opponents running at isolated defenders. That in turn means that when City or Liverpool concede goals it tends to look dreadful.

By signing Virgil Van Dijk and Aymeric Laporte, Liverpool and City have brought in players who are probably better at those traditional defensive arts than those who were already at the club. That, obviously, will help, but the issue is one of balance. For Pep Guardiola in particular, there is no point in having a powerhouse of a central defender who wins the vast majority of his aerial duels and is formidable on the ground if he cannot also pass.

That is one of the key lessons he learned from Johan Cruyff who, at Barcelona in the early 1990s, would at times play with Ronald Koeman as the central defender and Guardiola in front of him in a 3-4-3.

"They weren't fast and they weren't defenders," Cruyff said, but far more important was that their positioning was good and both were excellent distributors. Given that Barca spent most of the game in the opposition

Thrill...Barcelona beat Paris Saint-Germain in last year's Champions League after a 4-0 loss in the first leg

half, then as long as his keeper was prepared to play out of his box the chances of Barca being undone by a long ball from deep hit over Koeman and Guardiola were minimal.

If you could get at the heart of the defence, Cruyff's Barcelona could be vulnerable. But he reasoned that occasionally conceding what others would consider a soft goal was a worthwhile trade-off for the advantages he felt were brought to general play by operating with a high line and with players who were very comfortable on the ball.

Essentially he defended by trying not to have to defend: a high-risk strategy that led to four league titles and Barcelona's first European Cup, but also to a 4-0 defeat to Milan in the 1994 Champions League Final.

That paradox makes assessment difficult. In six of Guardiola's eight completed seasons as a coach his side has not merely won the league but done so in breathtaking style. Yet he has so far won only two Champions Leagues.

Has he won those league titles in such style because of the high-risk strategy, or would he have been more effective in European competition with something more conservative?

A similar assessment lies at the core of all those who adopt the approach. While the advantages can be enormous, there is an enormous potential downside. WS

Important figure...Ronald Koeman

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

Crash...Andre Villas-Boas

1 VILLAS-BOAS INJURED IN PARIS-DAKAR RALLY

Former Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas withdrew from his first Dakar Rally after damaging his back during the fourth stage in Peru.

The 40-year-old, who left his role as coach of Chinese side Shanghai SIPG in November to compete in the race, was two hours, 18 minutes and 50 seconds behind the leader when his Toyota Hilux hit a sand dune.

2 POLDI'S KEBAB SHOP

Former Cologne striker Lukas Podolski, who plays for Vissel Kobe in Japan these days, has returned to the German city to open a kebab shop.

And the excitement surrounding the grand opening of the Mangal Doner was such that more than a thousand fans queued around the block to be served by "Poldi", with some reportedly waiting five hours to place an order with their hero.

The 32-year-old, who was in the Germany squad that won the World Cup in 2014, is no stranger to the food business, having already opened an ice-cream parlour called Ice Cream United. He also has a clothing boutique, Street Kicker.

After signing autographs and serving customers, the German striker admitted: "Ideas just come – I don't even really have a business plan right now." And he countered arguments that he was setting a bad example as an athlete with his choice of nutrition, saying: "As an athlete, you'll burn a kebab in around 10 minutes."

3 VAR BLOCKED BY FAN FLAG

The trials of VAR have thrown up plenty of problems but none as strange as that experienced in the match between Aves and Boavista.

Aves midfielder Vitor Gomes was clearly offside when he scored in the Portuguese league game to give the home side a 3-0 lead, and furious protests from the visitors prompted the referee to call on the game's VAR official for a second opinion.

But the VAR official could not help – as a giant flag waived by a Boavista fan in the away end blocked the camera's view. And so the goal stood.

Caught short... Jurgen Damm

4 WINGER CHICKENS OUT

Mexico international Jurgen Damm became an internet sensation after footage appeared of him being led away from a fried-chicken restaurant in handcuffs after trying to hide from police in the shop's toilets.

The incident occurred when the 25-year-old winger, who plays for Tigres in his homeland, failed to stop after being requested to pull over while driving.

Fearing that he was about to be robbed, Damm later claimed: "I was confused when they asked me to stop my truck, and because I couldn't identify who it was I decided to hide somewhere close."

Shop...(above and below) Podolski's new kebab place

"As an opponent, team-mate and friend, he was, without doubt, one of the most honest and genuine gentlemen I had the good fortune to meet"

Bobby Charlton (left) pays tribute to Jimmy Armfield

OBITUARIES

Jimmy ARMFIELD (1935-2018)

Mr Blackpool... Jimmy Armfield at Bloomfield Road

A unique figure in the history of English football, Armfield was a 1966 World Cup winner who became a successful manager and then went on to enjoy an entire new career as a journalist and media pundit.

He made his debut as a right-back for his home-town club Blackpool and went on to play 17 seasons for the team, making a total of 627 appearances and earning himself the nickname of "Mr Blackpool".

He won 43 caps, captaining England on 15 occasions and played at the 1962 World Cup. However, an injury at the end of the 1963-64 season allowed George Cohen to take over as the national side's first-choice right-back. Armfield was a member of the 1966 World Cup squad but did not play at the finals.

Following his retirement as a player in 1971, he managed Bolton Wanderers, overseeing a promotion to the Second Division in 1973, before succeeding Don Revie at Leeds United in 1974. Leeds reached the 1975 European Cup Final but lost 2-0 to Bayern Munich.

Armfield left Leeds in 1978 and opted to pursue a career in the media. He worked as a reporter for the *Daily Express* for more than a decade before switching to the BBC, where he became a widely respected match summariser.

In 2002, the then-Sunderland manager Howard Wilkinson, irritated by journalists questioning his tactics at a press conference, asked "How many England caps have you got?" The quick reply from Armfield was: "Forty three, actually, Howard."

A hugely respected figure within the English game, Armfield also acted as consultant to the FA, playing a key role in the appointments of Terry Venables in 1994 and Glenn Hoddle in 1996.

• *See also Brian Glanville, page 22*

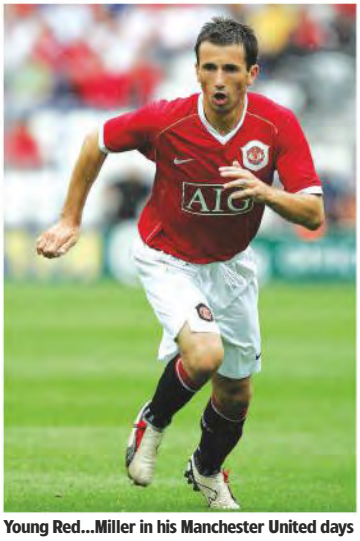
Journalist...at work as a football reporter

Majid ARIFF (1937-2018)
One of his country's greatest players, he was part of the Singapore side that finished a national best-ever fourth at the Asian Games in 1966.

Coach...Azeglio Vicini led Italy for 54 games

Azeglio VICINI (1933-2018)
After playing in the Italian top flight for Sampdoria, and winning Serie B with both Vicenza and Brescia, he would later coach Italy's under-23 side and then took the under-21s to the Final of the 1986 European Championship. He led the seniors to the semi-finals of both the 1988 European Championship and the 1990 World Cup on home soil. He was replaced as national coach by Arrigo Sacchi following the *Azzurri*'s failure to qualify for the 1992 Euros.

Liam MILLER (1981-2018)
The former Celtic, Manchester United and Sunderland midfielder won 21 caps for the Republic of Ireland. He also played in Australia for Perth Glory, Brisbane Roar and Melbourne City before returning home to play for Cork City.



Young Red...Miller in his Manchester United days

"I'm a bit of a disaster when it comes to convincing Chelsea to buy players. In this aspect I can improve a lot"

Antonio Conte does little to endear himself to his Stamford Bridge employers

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Opportunity ...Gus Poyet

Rescue mission... Clarence Seedorf

EUROPE

Italy under-21 boss **LUIGI DI BIAGIO** was handed interim control of the national senior side.

GUS POYET replaced Jocelyn Gourvennec as coach of Ligue 1 side Bordeaux.

Deportivo La Coruna sacked coach Cristobal Parralo and appointed **CLARENCE SEEDORF** until the end of the season.

JAVI GRACIA replaced Marco Silva as Watford manager after one win in 11 Premier League games.

TAYFUN KORKUT replaced Hannes Wolf at Bundesliga strugglers Stuttgart, while **BERND HOLLERBACH** took over from Markus Gisdol at Hamburg.

In Belgium, **PHILIPPE CLEMENT** took charge of Genk and was replaced at Waasland-Beveren by **SVEN VERMANT**. Mechelen brought in **DENNIS VAN WIJK** from second-tier Roeselare.

SILAS took over from Domingos Paciencia as coach of Portuguese side Belenenses, while **JOAO HENRIQUES** replaced Petit at Pacos de Ferreira.

SOUTH AMERICA

Argentinian **LUIS ZUBELDIA** replaced Leonel Alvarez as coach of last year's Paraguayan Clausura champions Cerro Porteno.

AFRICA

FAOUZI BENZARTI took charge of Moroccan champions Wydad.

ASIA

BERT VAN MARWIJK, who left Saudi Arabia days after leading them to the World Cup in Russia, will coach Australia at the finals.

Australia international **TIM CAHILL** rejoined Championship side Millwall in a bid to get some game time before the World Cup.

Atlanta United signed 18-year-old Argentinian striker **EZEQUIEL BARCO** from Independiente for an MLS-record fee of $15million.

Return...Tim Cahill is back at Millwall

Orange boss... Ronald Koeman

Koeman takes charge of Holland's national side

RONALD KOEMAN, who left Everton in October, was named national coach of Holland, agreeing a contract until 2022.

He replaced Dick Advocaat, who ended his third spell in charge of the Dutch following their failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

Injury...Ryan Mason has had to retire

OUT

EUROPE

Norwich City midfielder **WES HOOLAHAN** announced his international retirement after winning 43 caps for the Republic of Ireland.

Hull City midfielder **RYAN MASON**, who won one cap for England, was forced to retire at 26 as a result of the fractured skull he suffered against Chelsea in 2017.

SOUTH AMERICA

DIEGO LUGANO, who captained Uruguay to the World Cup semi-finals in 2010 and won the Copa America in 2011, retired at the age of 37 but will remain at Sao Paulo, the Brazilian club where he concluded his playing career.

AFRICA

Guinea sacked national coach **LAPPE BANGOURA** during a disappointing African Nations Championship finals.

OCEANIA

SHANE SMELTZ, who scored New Zealand's goal in a 1-1 draw with Italy at the 2010 World Cup, announced his retirement at the age of 36. He scored 24 goals in 58 internationals.

Kiwi hero... Shane Smeltz

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Help...Craig Pawson consults VAR at Anfield

Anfield confusion demonstrates 'Spy in the sky' is a complex business

Perhaps inevitably, the introduction of VAR in the FA Cup has elicited instant controversy. Not least in the dramatic tie at Anfield, in which West Bromwich Albion got the better of Liverpool.

Even though his team scored three goals, West Brom manager Alan Pardew still had some interesting things to say about the new system.

"It's hard to know where to start," commented Pardew after the game. "I don't think this is what we want to see going forward, whether you are a Liverpool or West Brom fan.

"Firstly, there is no communication from the referee to us – like in the NFL when there is a call and they say they are going to look at that. But the bigger decision was the four minutes for the Salah decision [a missed penalty for Liverpool]. You are going from high-tempo work rate to nothing. We had a hamstring just after that.

"As a coach, we have to change. We are going to have to get our players to mentally warm-up in that situation and keep themselves ticking over.

"As a football person on the sidelines, I wasn't comfortable with the first half. It was a mysterious situation at times."

A complex one, certainly. On 19 minutes, it took two minutes' consultation between the referee, Craig Pawson, and his "spy in the sky", Andre Mariner, to disallow a Craig Dawson goal for West Brom for offside against Gareth Barry.

Soon afterwards, Pawson saw nothing wrong with a tug by the visitors' Jake Livermore on Liverpool's Mohamed Salah. It was the spy in the sky that gave the spot-kick after several minutes' stasis.

And what of Albion's third goal, duly awarded again after consultation? An own goal by Joel Matip, with Jay Rodriguez standing in an offside position.

The referee and his spy in the sky endorsed the goal.

No goal...VAR ruled that Gareth Barry (centre) was offside

> "I don't think this is what we want to see going forward" Alan Pardew

Allardyce's time has been and gone

Everton's poor recent form has posed serious questions about the competence of Sam Allardyce, brought in to revitalise the team after the abrupt departure of Ronald Koeman.

After one or two useful victories, which at least seemed to keep the spectre of relegation at bay, he has left both Wayne Rooney and Gylfi Sigurdsson on the bench of late. They could hardly have done any worse in a team which has been overwhelmed at times.

It also surprised me that he loaned talented winger Ademola Lookman to RB Leipzig of the Bundesliga, where he made an immediate impact. He is a player I have much admired for his pace, control and efficacy since his early days at Charlton Athletic, where he developed.

I fear that Allardyce as manager has passed his meridian, but it would be very expensive for Everton to fire him now. And whom would they bring in?

Questions... Sam Allardyce

Gentleman Jimmy was a cut above the rest

Jimmy Armfield, whom I knew for so many years, was a footballer and a gentleman. Educationally a cut above most of his playing contemporaries, he was thoughtful, intelligent, humorous and a splendid right-back. He played in the Chilean World Cup, but in the victorious 1966 tournament his place at right-back went to George Cohen.

How well I remember sitting next to him at the Bank of England training ground around the time of the World Cup quarter-finals. What chance did England have, I asked him. "Slight," he said, depressingly. But luckily he was proved wrong, which doubtless delighted him.

He was a grammar-school boy, always fluent, composed and mature. Even in the midst of a tumultuous press room in Barcelona when Leeds United, whom he was managing capably at the time, contested a European Cup semi-final. A room from which Rober Vergna, the noted correspondent of *France Football*, was led away by the police in chains, having kicked out at a local radio commentator – who, luckily for him, refused to press charges.

• *Jimmy Armfield obituary, page 20*

Sitting out...Jimmy Armfield (right) with Jimmy Greaves at an England training session in 1966

What now for Wilshere with club and country?

Whither Wilshere? A question which in recent weeks seemed happily to have been put to rest after the talented midfielder had regained his first-team place with panache, after playing the bulk of the season with what amounted to Arsenal's reserve team.

But Arsenal, spending prolifically in the transfer window, have acquired the talented Henrikh Mkhitaryan from Manchester United. He hit the ground running in his display at home to an overwhelmed Everton, while that talented Welsh international Aaron Ramsey returned to the team to score a hat-trick.

Where now will be the place for Wilshere? I feel this is an important question, not only for the player himself but for the England team, who have no comparable playmaker available.

Gareth Southgate has suggested that there would be a place in his side for Wilshere and so there should be, but if he isn't playing for Arsenal – something that Southgate has hinted at before – it would be hard to pick him, even for an England team that needs him.

Talent...Jack Wilshere (right)

Conte caught in a Chelsea conundrum

Another manager whose stock has plummeted is Antonio Conte at Chelsea. Two shocking defeats – an almost incredible 3-0 crash at home to modest Bournemouth followed by a 4-1 eclipse at Watford – made it likely indeed that he won't see more than this season at Stamford Bridge.

It seems quite clear that Chelsea benefited greatly from not being involved last season in either of the European competitions. This season, Conte's demanding training sessions and the profusion of matches in the various tournaments seem to have taken their toll. Yet what of his seasons of success at Juventus, who were usually involved in European competition but still managed to lead Serie A for years?

Conte has made it plain enough with his protests that he has not been given enough playing resources. There is also the fact that his relations with Marina Granovskaia, who has become a power at the club, are fragile to a degree that he would be happy to move on.

With a year and a half still to be paid up on his contract of some £9million a year, he would hardly be on skid row.

Meanwhile, Conte continues to make defiant noises which have the smack of desperation about them, claiming: "Do you think a club can decide to sack a coach if there is not the support of the players? You think that players have the power? Yes? This is wrong. This is wrong if it happens. Yes?"

To the onlooker, it appears that Conte is caught between the upper and the lower millstone.

Meanwhile, Luis Enrique waits in the wings. And Chelsea miss Diego Costa.

Pressure...Antonio Conte

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

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NEYMAR JR VS CRISTIANO RONALDO

Both share the same unpredictable and fearless style of play, but where they differ is in their choice of footwear. The Portuguese hitman may be 33 years old now, but the Los Blancos striker still knows how to find the back of the net while wearing the Mercurial Superfly VI Elite, whereas PSG's Brazilian superstar continues to bamboozle Ligue 1 defenders with his array of tricks in the Mercurial Vapor XII Elite.

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QR: 176030 - £55

NIKE GRIP STRIKE LIGHT CREW SOCKS
QR: 153994 - £22

eye witness

Steve Menary

MOROCCO

Desert ambition

Morocco's hastily assembled bid to host the 2026 World Cup has been long in the making

The 2018 African Nations Championship (CHAN) came at an opportune moment for Morocco. Having replaced original hosts Kenya just three months before kick-off, the north African kingdom not only won the tournament but also found time to put together a bid for the 2026 World Cup.

Morocco beat Nigeria 4-0 in the Final at the Stade Mohamed V in Casablanca, which was rammed for the hosts' games, although some other attendances during the tournament were disappointing. While migrant workers from Cameroon and Libya, for example, boosted crowds at venues such as Tangier, spectators at a group decider between Zambia and Namibia were outnumbered by stewards.

With 2026 in mind, FIFA had secretly despatched staff to monitor proceedings and their reports should be favourable. Meanwhile, Morocco's triumph on the pitch suggests there is reason for optimism in Russia this summer.

With CHAN being a tournament solely for players who compete in domestic African leagues, Morocco's winning side was mostly a second XI. Many of national coach Herve Renard's first-choice XI are the children of expats living abroad, with the likes of captain Medhi Benatia, who plays in Serie A for Juventus, born in France, while Moubarak Boussoufa, who is now in Qatar, and Feyenoord's defensive midfielder Karim El Ahmadi both grew up in Holland.

The Federation Royal Marocaine de Football (FRMF) made a conscious effort to find these players – and they were a major factor in helping the country clinch a first World Cup qualification since 1998.

After a 20-year absence, missing out again would have dented Morocco's chances of hosting the 2026 World Cup. Instead, it is the USA – who are making a joint-bid for the tournament, alongside Canada and Mexico – who will be left at home kicking their heels this summer.

Russia will be the fifth World Cup finals' appearance for Morocco, who entered for the first time in 1962 and qualified at the third attempt for Mexico 1970, where they were not disgraced.

After missing out on the next three tournaments, they returned to Mexico in 1986 and reached the last 16 after winning their group thanks to a sensational 3-1 victory over Portugal. They also qualified in 1994 and 1998 but failed to win a game.

A year later, King Mohammed VI

Flying...Morocco's Ismail Haddad hurdles Stephen Eze of Nigeria on his way to victory in the CHAN Final

Triumph...Morocco's Badr Banoun lifts the trophy

Formal...Morocco announces it will bid for the 2026 World Cup at a press conference in Casablanca

Support...a poster promoting the CHAN tournament

took the throne after the death of his father King Hassan II and ushered in nearly two decades of modernisation and investment.

Under King Hassan II, Morocco bid for the 1994, 1998 and 2006 World Cups, and then tried again for the 2010 finals which FIFA had decreed must go to an African nation. However, amid a swirl of corruption allegations still to surface in the long-running FIFAgate trials in New York, South Africa pipped Morocco by 14 votes to 10 – and the decision still frustrates many in Morocco.

"We know how we lost," says Hicham El Khilifi, the co-owner of Morocco's biggest sports radio station, Radio Mars. "It was not transparent."

The decision to make a fifth bid came late and was only confirmed last summer, long after the North America bid had begun making a stream of public statements. Only in January 2018 did the King appoint a bid team.

In Morocco, few refer directly to the King, preferring instead the epithet "the Kingdom". Most Moroccans agree that without the Kingdom, there would be no CHAN or World Cup bid.

"Any big decision must have the support of the Kingdom," says one local, who like anyone discussing the King prefers not to be named.

After a batch of reforms aimed at stemming endemic corruption, all of FIFA's members will vote on the 2026 World Cup and Morocco's bid is stronger than its predecessors.

There has been significant investment in stadia and infrastructure, with new toll roads and a 20billion dirham (£1.5bn) high-speed rail link between Casablanca and Tangier. But this spending has irked some, who feel the cash could have been better spent on schools and hospitals.

When the Morocco 2026 bid staged a hastily arranged press conference in the Casablanca Sofitel on January 23, this first attempt to communicate was dominated by the domestic media.

The cost of bidding for and staging the 2026 World Cup was raised in each of three rounds of questions, but no one on a panel led by FRMF president Fouzi Lekjaa would give any figures.

The rival North American bid has aired concerns over the commercial value of staging a tournament in Africa again, but Morocco is working on a financial document to show how the figures stack up. Yet bid chief executive Hicham El Amrani is giving little away.

"We are able to quantify these [figures] but we will do so in the bid book," says El Amrani. "It's part of providing a bid book on March 16 that is safe and sound.

"Those figures have been worked on. We will provide statutory evidence that a World Cup in Morocco will be highly profitable.

"When you talk about the sponsors, first of all there are the FIFA partners and sponsors who are there regardless of the host country. The rest are local partners or national supporters.

"That category is minimal when you look at the percentage taken by FIFA sponsors and partners. The majority of income comes from TV rights.

"Our geographic location and time zones match the same as nine African cities and 16 European nations, making a big impact in terms of profitability."

Insiders suggest that the aggregate cost of Morocco's five World Cup bids is around £70million, but no one will confirm this or the cost of hosting CHAN.

January's tournament was the first step towards staging the World Cup, with the second being the African Nations Cup (ANC). Morocco are favorites to replace Cameroon in 2019 if they do not make sufficient progress on preparations.

Morocco were due to

> "We will provide statutory evidence that a World Cup in Morocco will be highly profitable"
> Morocco's bid chief executive, Hicham El Amrani

BID TIMELINE

- **15 OCTOBER 2017** – Deadline for submitting bid registration documents
- **16 OCTOBER 2017** – FIFA dispatches bid agreement
- **30 NOVEMBER 2017** – Deadline for submitting completed bid agreement
- **16 MARCH 2018** – Submission of bids to FIFA
- **15 JUNE 2018** – FIFA Congress votes

Leader...national coach Herve Renard gives Noureddine Amrabat instructions

Potential venue...Stade Ibn Batouta in Tangier

Backing...Morocco fans at a game in Ivory Coast last year

stage the 2015 ANC and upset many in Africa when they gave up the rights due to concerns over the Ebola epidemic. Taking on CHAN at short notice helped make amends.

While CHAN was staged in four cities – Agadir, Casablanca, Marrakesh and Tangier – no 2026 venues have yet been confirmed, although "six existing stadia" have been repeatedly referenced, and they are understood to be the CHAN venues plus Fez and Rabat.

In the past decade, around £175m has been spent renovating the Fez, Marrakech and Tangier stadia, which have capacities of 45,000, 45,250 and 45,000 respectively. Agadir can hold 45,480 fans, Casablanca has a 67,000 capacity and Rabat 45,200. All comfortably meet FIFA's stadia criteria, but more are needed.

At the bid launch, sports minister Rachid Talbi Alami said: "We have got a lot of great stadia but there is a lot of effort required on that. Finance is required."

El Amrani says a total of eight more stadia will be built if Morocco win the bid, but modular construction will be used at some venues to provide a capacity of more than 40,000 that can be cut to 20,000 after the World Cup.

Work started in 2015 on a 50,000 stadium in Tetouan, which will cost 700m dirham (£55m) and opens next year. But given Moghreb Tetouan's woeful performance in this season's domestic championship, that project could look like a white elephant.

Proposals are in the pipeline for a 40,000 ground in Kenitra, a 55,000 stadium in Oujda and a 40,000 arena in Al Hoceima, but not all Morocco's clubs can draw the crowds managed by Wydad and Raja for the Casablanca derby.

On the pitch, the performance of Moroccan sides in African club competitions has illustrated the strength of the local championship. Wydad won the CAF Champions League for a second time in 2017, while Raja have twice played in the Club World Cup and reached the 2013 Final.

According to the local branch of international players union FIFPro, which is run by former international Mustapha El Hadaoui, footballers in Morocco "enjoy reasonable conditions, and report less incidence of violence and harassment than in most other African countries".

FIFPro research from 2016 shows that 84 per cent of players experienced late

payment, although Morocco's footballers are among the best paid in Africa.

In 2016, average wages were £800 a month but bonuses and subsequent wage inflation means that star players at big clubs can earn from £45,000 up to £180,000 a year.

World Cup qualification was also well rewarded. The players got a bonus of one million dirhams (£80,000) and Renard's salary was increased by a third to 800,000 dirhams (£65,000) a month according to local media reports.

Major clubs such as Raja and Wydad can earn as much as £70,000 in gate receipts from a big game, although smaller clubs make much less and have to rely on FRMF support.

The FRMF reportedly has revenues of 681m dirhams (£53m). Sponsors such as Maroc Telecom provide 567m dirhams (£44m) of this, with the balance derived from TV rights.

In 2015, the FRMF distributed 175m dirhams (£13m) in grants and bonuses to clubs in the top two divisions with the eventual national champions getting three million dirhams (which is about £230,000).

In return, the FRMF has sought greater control over youth development. It used to give clubs £90,000 a year towards youth development, but when it was discovered that this money tended to go on players' wages, a new deal was struck. Now the FRMF pays the wages of a technical director and conditioning coach – around £50,000 and £30,000 a year respectively – for each club, which gets the balance for unspecified use. It was a hard deal for clubs to turn down.

The FRMF has also introduced rules banning overseas goalkeepers and only allows clubs to use a maximum of four foreign players.

In 2015, experienced Dutch coach Mark Wotte was recruited to run the country's under-23s and his challenge, apart from helping develop the youth set-up, is to qualify Morocco for the 2020 Olympic football tournament.

This means finishing in the top three at the 2019 Africa Nations Cup Under-23s in Egypt. The finals only feature eight teams, so with the hosts qualifying automatically and qualification for the remaining seven slots decided by an unseeded knockout qualification system it is a tough task.

Success...Wydad celebrate winning the CAF Champions League last year

Sitting in the bar at the swish View Hotel in Rabat, Wotte – who was the Scottish Football Association's technical director for three years before coming to Morocco and has coaching experience in Egypt, Qatar and Romania – shrugs off the pressure

"The good thing about Morocco is that they are like Scotland in that they want to participate again," says Wotte. "That is driving all the projects here."

While Moghreb Tetouan and Rabat sides FAR and Fath Union Sport have good academies, the Academie Mohammed VI de Football (AMF) in Sale is widely viewed as the best.

"AMF has already produced 60 players that play first-team football," adds Wotte, citing 20-year-old defender Hamza Mendyl, who joined Ligue 1 side Lille two years ago and has a good chance of going to Russia.

Morocco's influence increasingly extends beyond its national border. Prior to launching the bid, the FRMF signed technical agreements with more than 40 other African associations from Gambia to Zambia, which can come and use Moroccan facilities.

The FRMF is also investing £3.5m in the football infrastructure in Malawi and

Trouble...Wydad fans riot in December 2015

last summer, Morocco staged a friendly tournament in Agadir featuring themselves, Kenya, Mauritania, Malawi, Niger and Togo.

In Tanzania, Morocco is supporting the construction of a new football stadium costing up to £70m in Dodoma. Like the Malawi deal, this came at the behest of King Mohammed VI, who visited Dodoma in October 2016.

In late January, a FIFA letter distributed to member associations seemed to prohibit these agreements, which had all been signed before Morocco confirmed their bid. For many, this smacked of FIFA favouritism towards North America – and that is not the only issue for Morocco.

Although Morocco was not caught up in the Arab Spring, dissenters exist within the country and hooliganism can be a problem at local matches. In February 2009, 14 fans were jailed after a confrontation between Raja and Wydad supporters. In 2013, more than 200 arrests were made after trouble flared at the Casablanca derby.

> "The good thing about Morocco is that they are like Scotland in that they want to participate again. That is driving all the projects here"
>
> **Morocco under-23 coach, Mark Wotte**

Hosting the World Cup would also be a public-relations gift for activists from Western Sahara.

Formerly Spanish Sahara, the region, was annexed by Morocco in 1975 and the dispute, though little covered, remains unresolved. A 2026 World Cup in Morocco would attract huge global media attention, just as the 2022 tournament has highlighted the iniquitous treatment of migrant building workers in Qatar under the Kafala system.

FIFA's new World Cup bid criteria includes clauses on human rights but Lekjaa insists: "We have made big strides in the terms of human rights."

Sahrawi activists would not agree and they have already used football to protest. In 2012, a Western Sahara team took part in the VIVA World Cup for unrecognised states in Kurdistan. The Sahrawi association has been inactive since but joined the Confederation of International Football Associations in 2016, and a 2026 World Cup in Morocco would inevitably spur more activity.

A more obvious obstacle to winning the 2026 bid is FIFA's technical report stage, which could derail Morocco.

But even if the June 13 vote is lost, the country's increasingly international sporting ambitions seem highly unlikely to go away. **WS**

Pride...Moroccans celebrate World Cup qualification

MOROCCO'S MOVERS & SHAKERS

● HICHAM EL AMRANI
Urbane and bilingual, he was general secretary of the Confederation of African Football for eight years, until March 2017. The international face of the Morocco 2026 bid, he was appointed chief executive officer in November 2017.

● FOUZI LEKJAA
Elected unopposed in October 2017 for a second term as president of the Federation Royal Marocaine de Football. Previously worked in the government, where he was better known for finance than football. Generally seen as being progressive, he was elected third vice-president of CAF in July 2017.

Impact...Renard

● MOULAY HAFID ELALAMY
The chairman of the Moroccan bid is the founder of Moroccan insurance firm Saham and also minister for industry, trade & new technologies. In 2015, Forbes estimated he was among Africa's 50 richest people with a net worth of £445million.

Urbane...El Amrani

● RACHID TALBI ALAMI
Appointed Morocco's minister for sport & youth in April 2017.

Spin doctor...Lee

● MIKE LEE
The former director of public affairs at UEFA, his PR firm Vero is advising the Moroccans on their 2026 bid. An experienced football spin doctor from England, he was also involved in the successful Qatar 2022 World Cup bid.

● HERVE RENARD
The experienced French coach won the African Nations Cup in 2012 with Zambia and again in 2015 with Ivory Coast, and is looking to make an impact in Russia.

25 NEXT GENERATION COACHES

They may not be household names just yet, but these are some of the most up-and-coming men in the game today

Guillermo ALMADA	p33
Ludovic BATELLI	p33
Manuel BAUM	p38
Miguel CARDOSO	p35
Sergio CONCEICAO	p34
Luigi DI BIAGIO	p35
Paulo FONSECA	p39
Ricardo GARECA	p35
Asier GARITANO	p35
Ariel HOLAN	p37
Adi HUTTER	p37
Niko KOVAC	p37
Thierry LAUREY	p42
Razvan LUCESCU	p39
Jose Luis MENDILIBAR	p39
Julian NAGELSMANN	p36
Massimo ODDO	p43
Sunday OLISEH	p40
PEPA	p39
Willy SAGNOL	p41
Maurizio SARRI	p30
Maurice STEIJN	p41
Juan Carlos UNZUE	p41
Mitchell VAN DER GAAG	p43
Patrick VIEIRA	p43

Maurizio SARRI

Old dog teaching Napoli new tricks

When Maurizio Sarri received a phone call from Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentis in the summer of 2015, at first he thought he was the victim of a practical joke. By his own admission, it took Sarri a while before he realised that it really was the cinema tycoon on the other end of the line, asking him if he would accept the job of Napoli coach.

Sarri's moment of disbelief was understandable. Can it be, he must have asked himself, that after 20 years as a bank clerk, 25 years as a coach to 17 different clubs and just one season in Serie A, can it be that he was about to land the Napoli job? Was a career which began with amateur teams such as Stia, Faellese, Cavriglia and Antella about to move into the thin-oxygen zones of Serie A and the Champions League?

Disbelief...Sarri seemed a surprise choice to coach Napoli

The point about Sarri is that he belongs in that restricted circle of success stories – Arrigo Sacchi is another – who did not play professional football prior to coaching. When Sarri finally gave up his job as a bank employee in 1999, at the age of 40, he had already coached six amateur clubs.

"For me the bank was a piece of paper, a safe job," he told *La Repubblica* many years later. "I used to handle inter-bank currency exchange relations and I travelled all around Europe. But with the

Crowded out... watching Napoli's 4-1 victory against Lazio (in stripes)

arrival of the Euro in 1999 there wasn't much money to be made working in currency exchange.

"As an amateur coach, on the way up, I reckoned I would survive all the same, but above all I was fed up hanging around at work just waiting impatiently to knock off at five in the evening and head off to team training."

It is an understatement to suggest that the 59-year-old is one of those Italian coaches who have done "*la gavetta*" (learned the ropes on the pitch). The poetic aspect of his 25-year-long rise to the top is that it ended up in his alma mater, namely Naples.

Although he has lived the majority of his adult life in Tuscany, and even started his football career there, Sarri was born in Naples. His father was a crane driver who moved down to the city to work in the huge Bagnoli steel plant, which is sited on the Bay of Naples, close to the city centre.

Growing up as a child in Figline outside Florence, Sarri used to be in a minority. While most of friends supported Fiorentina – with others following Internazionale and Milan, or even the dreaded Juventus – Sarri was a loyal Napoli fan. He recalls going to a Fiorentina game at home to Napoli and positioning himself among the away fans. So when the bank clerk ended up with the Napoli job, it really did seem too good to be true.

But De Laurentis had not just picked

Promotion...he took Empoli into Serie A

the name out of a hat. Like everyone else in Italian football, he had been much impressed by the quality of football played by the Sarri-coached Empoli side. With Empoli from 2012 to 2015, he had won promotion to Serie A with them in the 2014 season.

While that in itself was good enough, it was the bright, positive football played by the newly promoted side that caught a lot of attention. Not only was the football attractive, it was also effective as Sarri's side managed to stay up at the end of that 2014-15 campaign.

Many wondered, however, if the old dog for the hard road of life in the lower divisions would survive at the very top, in charge of one of the current power houses of Serie A. It was only natural for some critics to wonder if, at the age of 56, the Napoli job had come too late.

Would his bright attacking football survive the test at the very top?

And there may still be those not entirely convinced by Sarri's Napoli.

Champions League failures against Manchester City this season, and against Real Madrid last term, would suggest that, at the highest level, his team is still in need of personality, conviction and stage presence. At home in Italy, however, Napoli lack very little and currently lead the dance.

It says all you need to know about the quality of Sarri's team that, right now, Napoli are the only conceivable obstacle standing between Juventus and a seventh consecutive title.

For the past two seasons, Napoli have looked the only side that could make a fight of it with Juve, especially in a dramatic 2015-2016 campaign when then-Napoli striker Gonzalo Higuain scored a record-breaking 36 Serie A goals. In the end, Juventus prevailed in the head to heads and the Napoli challenge wilted with the club eventually finishing second.

There have been signs, though, that this year it might just be different. An emphatic 4-1 home win over third-place Lazio, in a game which had begun with Napoli conceding a soft early goal, certainly looked significant. Napoli took to the field 24 hours after Juventus had thrown down the gauntlet, again overtaking them at the top of the table. The pressure was on and if ever there was moment for a wobble this was it.

However, that result – and others this season – would appear to give the definitive lie to any notion that Sarri cannot hack it at the top. What's more, he not only gets results but he gets them while remaining true to an attractive, positive 4-3-3 set-up that relies more on skill and technique than on muscle and brawn. Sarri likes to quote his granddad who would say: "We're playing football here, we're not unloading a lorry."

Not for nothing, the current Napoli side relies on a front line made up of three "little 'uns but good 'uns", with Dris Mertens flanked by Jose Callejon and Lorenzo Insigne. Faced with the lack of a central striker after the departure of Higuain and last season's early injury to Arkadi Milik, Sarri settled on the notion of Mertens as his centre-forward. Some 15 goals and counting later, the idea seems to have worked.

Mertens might not be good at unloading a lorry but he is distinctly handy in front of goal.

If Sarri's Napoli have a limitation then it is a very non-Italian one. Namely, he never plays the percentage game; rather his sides go out to play and take the game to the opposition. There is no sitting back and waiting in your own half for the opposition to come at you.

Sarri freely admits that one of his inspirations as a coach is Sacchi – the man who revolutionised Italian soccer with his Gullit-

Positive..winning football with an attractive style

> "My football is both application and fun. And if you are having fun, it is less tiring. You must never extinguish the child that is in every footballer"

Early days...in charge of Grosseto in 2010

Studious...he is a deep thinker who makes copious notes during games

Van Basten-Rijkaard inspired Milan team which turned the all-prevalent defensive Italian creed upside down with its attacking game.

Critics have suggested that Napoli's style is both too predictable and too physically demanding. But when asked about this by *Guerin Sportivo* recently, Sarri said: "If I look at the mental and physical state of the team at the end of last season, I would say no.

"My football is both application and fun. And if you are having fun, it is less tiring. You must never extinguish the child that is in every footballer."

If there is one accusation that critics are unlikely to ever level at Sarri it is that of being too politically correct.

Probably the first time that many outside of Italy noticed him came in January two years ago when he was involved in an unpleasant touchline row during an Italian Cup game with then-Inter coach, Roberto Mancini, calling his opposite number a "queer", for which he later issued a formal apology.

The thing is that Sarri sometimes seems like a coach from a different era. He likes to wear the old fashioned tracksuit, rather than the club blazer, shirt and tie when he sits on the bench. It is more comfortable, he says, and anyway he is not a fashion model.

He is an inveterate, heavy smoker who would probably smoke his way through a game if it were allowed, and he is not a frequent user of social news media.

Sarri expects his players to work hard and to train hard, and he is the first to admit that not every player finds this easy. He summed up his coaching philosophy neatly last year when telling *La Repubblica*: "I don't consider myself the depositary of truth but here you do what I say."

However, brand Sarri a dinosaur at your peril. He is always scribbling notes to himself on the touchline during games. He says he writes for two reasons. Firstly, he wants to focus on those "four things" that he wants to say at half-time. Secondly, he likes to take note of the time that certain incidents, movements, mistakes took place. That way, it is much quicker when it comes to editing his review of the game for post-mortem study purposes.

Sarri is also a coach who has not hesitated to use a drone during training, while he reckons that during his average working day he could spend up to 13 hours on tactics, between coaching sessions, video sessions and reading.

So then, where next for Sarri? Much will obviously depend on this season's results. Were he to lead Napoli to a third title triumph following the two won during the Maradona years – in 1987 and 1990 – he might well decide that the job was done and it was time to leave. Intriguingly, he has said that "after Napoli", he could see himself working outside of Italy, in Spain or indeed in the Premier League.

Could it be that, before long, Italy will be exporting yet another talented coach to follow on in the footsteps of Lippi, Ancelotti, Mancini, Ranieri, Conte et al?

Paddy Agnew

Guillermo ALMADA
Wily Uruguayan who was widely praised for leading Ecuadorian side Barcelona to the semi-finals of the Libertadores Cup in 2017, having won the domestic title the year before.

Ludovic BATELLI
A former goalkeeper who was the architect of France's European Under-19 title in 2016. Currently unemployed after the Gallic federation controversially let him go last summer.

Sergio CONCEICAO

Pushing Porto to new heights

All good teams reflect the personality of their coach and this very much applies to Conceicao's Porto, who are infused from top to bottom with the intensity, bravery, passion and single-mindedness of the man in charge.

A right-winger in his playing days – winning 56 caps for Portugal and notably starring for Porto, as well as Italian clubs Lazio, Parma and Internazionale – the 43-year-old does not only produce results but he delivers them post-haste, absolutely in his element when asked to swiftly turn a gaggle of underachievers into a real collective force.

Both this season and last, his Midas touch has been there for all to see: first at Nantes, who he steered from second-bottom in Ligue 1 to seventh in just a few months, then inspiring a remarkable revival at Porto, who after going four years without a trophy are once more flying high, putting together a long unbeaten run in the Portuguese top flight and qualifying for the last 16 of the Champions League.

Even if his preference for a 4-4-2 does not make him a reinventor of the tactical wheel, his teams certainly look the part with their ferocious high press and non-stop attacking intent. He insists on as much penetration as possible in wide areas and loves nothing more than to flood the opposition box with runners.

Those who fail to meet his exacting matchday standards of energy, discipline and aggression won't be around for long, while on the training ground he is a hard taskmaster, often ordering two sessions per day and quick to show his displeasure if anyone's concentration wanders.

"He's a coach who puts a lot of emphasis on the tactical side of the game," says midfielder Guillaume Gillet, who played under him at Nantes. "He's very demanding, very fussy. You have to be switched on. If you're not, he'll let you know about it."

Apart from his attention to detail, Conceicao is also a wonderful motivator. Players simply soak up his enthusiasm and positivity, not to mention the "us against the world" rhetoric. Workplace unity is vital too, with the squad required to come in early every day and have breakfast together.

> "I quickly realised that he would go to war if it meant we'd have the right results"
> **French defender Vincent Sasso**

In many ways, he is cut from the same cloth as compatriot Jose Mourinho. Temperamentally the pair could be twins, alternatively voluble, fiery, theatrical, charming and charismatic. Like Mourinho he is a mind-game devotee, often using his press conferences to get under the skin of opponents such as Rui Vitoria, the coach of arch-rivals Benfica.

"He's an absolute leader of men," says French defender Vincent Sasso, who played for him at Portuguese side Braga. "I quickly realised that he would go to war if it meant we'd have the right results."

Nick Bidwell

Passion...leading by example

Demanding... standards are high and must be met

Asier GARITANO

Shaking things up in La Liga

Now in his fifth season at Leganes, a club from the southern outskirts of Madrid who are known as *Los Pepineros* ("the cucumber growers"), Garitano has worked a succession of miracles these past few years.

Promotion from the third tier to the second in his inaugural campaign at the helm; the club's first-ever promotion to the top flight two years later; elite survival last term – and then this season's remarkable 2-1 victory at the Bernabeu to knock Real Madrid out of the Spanish Cup.

Leganes' annual budget of €45million is the lowest in La Liga and the squad is essentially a superstar-free zone, but that has not prevented the 48-year-old from assembling a line-up which punches well above its weight.

> "Winning promotion to the second division was more important"
>
> **Garitano, after Leganes knocked Real Madrid out of the Spanish Cup at the Bernabeu**

Solid, well-organised and enterprising on the break, the team's key to success is undoubtedly the coach's ability as a defensive co-ordinator. As a result of endless hours of drills on the training ground, Leganes have become the masters of the triple-locked back door in which everyone moves in unison, stays compact and shepherds opposition attacks out to the flanks.

Calm, methodical and meticulous, Garitano has created one of the meanest rearguards in the Spanish league. But don't make the mistake of thinking that he has 11 automatons out on the pitch. He constantly changes the tactical set-up – this season alone he has used five variants – and always shows a great deal of flexibility in his out-of-possession strategy; sometimes instructing the side to sit deep, sometimes triggering the press around the half-way line.

Organised...he has turned Leganes into a solid defensive unit

Another of his strong suits is his level-headedness and his flair for keeping his squad focused on the job in hand. Whether vanquished or victorious, he keeps his emotions in check, and even after beating Real Madrid he was breathtakingly matter-of-fact about it all. "No, I don't think this was our best-ever exploit," he told the media. "Winning promotion to the second division was more important."

The ultimate compliment one can pay Garitano is that, week in and week out, Leganes never play with fear or take to the field with an inferiority complex. Faced with Cristiano, Messi or Griezmann, he makes sure his charges play the shirt not the man, stating: "What I want is to always be competitive. The phrase 'out of your league' is one I've never liked."

A Real Sociedad fan as a boy, he was a skilful striker with Athletic Bilbao's juniors and reserves but never made the first team. After playing for a string of Spanish second and third division clubs, he finished his career at Alicante before becoming a coach.

His first job was an unusual one – employed by the country's national federation to supervise a group of unemployed professional footballers.

Nick Bidwell

Miguel CARDOSO
Impressive Rio Ave boss who is thriving in his first senior appointment. A former PE teacher, he is an excellent defensive organiser.

Luigi DI BIAGIO
The former Italy midfielder recently stepped up to take temporary charge of the senior national side after almost five years as under-21 boss.

Ricardo GARECA
About to take Peru to their first World Cup finals appearance in 35 years. The hard-nosed Argentinian is renowned for creating strong teams from supposedly inferior materials.

Julian NAGELSMANN

Hoffenheim's boy wonder with talent beyond his years

As the youngest coach in the Bundesliga, Nagelsmann's success with Hoffenheim has paved the way for a new batch of novice bosses in the German top flight. Taking their lead from the success last term of the 30-year-old, more and more Bundesliga clubs are plumping for a new wave of technical area talent.

Sandro Schwarz, formerly responsible for Mainz's under-23s, was put in charge of the first team last summer. Having traded their usual top-four berth for a brush with relegation, Bayer Leverkusen handed their reclamation project to elite rookie Heiko Herrlich. Schalke, meanwhile, appointed 31-year-old Domenico Tedesco, whose only leadership experience was 11 games in charge at second-tier Erzgebirge Aue.

It is not hard to see why other clubs are taking a leaf out of Hoffenheim's book. Since taking over at the south-westerner club two years ago, the coach has not only transformed a floundering, dispirited group into a top-four side, he has done it in an unfussy, perceptive way.

Renowned for his innovation on the training ground, his tactical flair and considerable powers of motivation, it is little wonder Hoffenheim founding father Dietmar Hopp puts him "on a par with a Mourinho, Klopp or Guardiola".

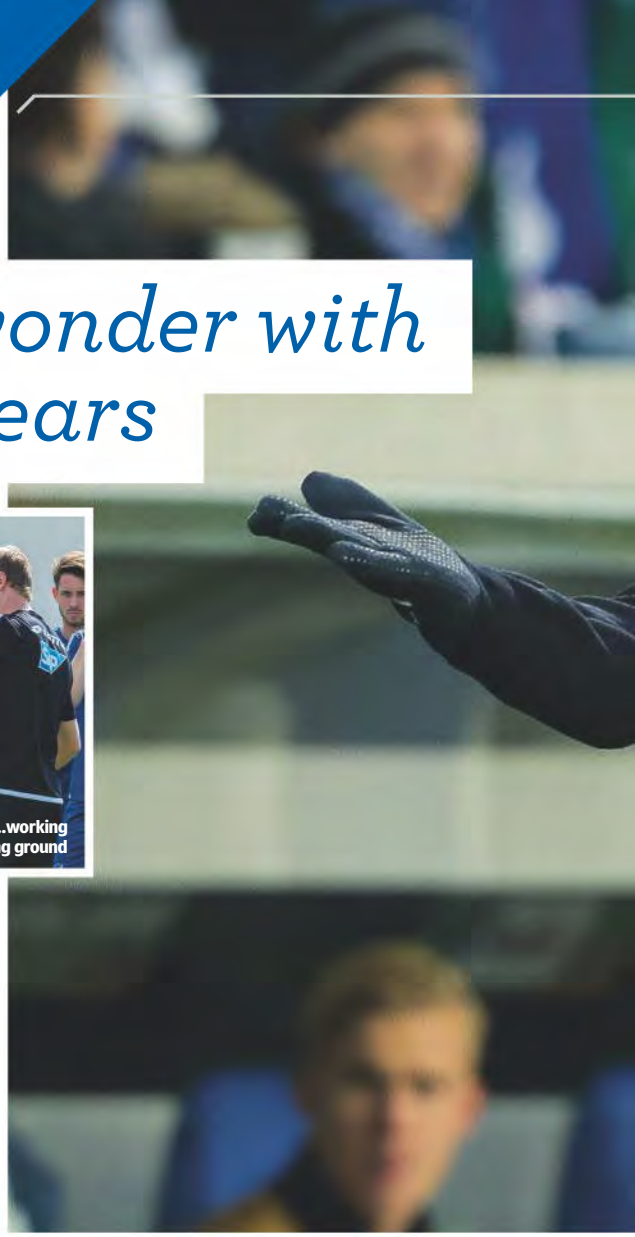
Understandably, though, many were sceptical when Nagelsmann was appointed coach in the autumn of 2015, promoted from his position in charge of the club's under-19 side. He had been due to take over at the start of the following season, but when Huub Stevens resigned on health grounds in February 2016, Nagelsmann became the youngest coach to be put in charge of a Bundesliga first team. At the age of 28, a number of Hoffenheim's senior players were older than their coach.

Innovative...working on the training ground

With Hoffenheim in 17th place in the table and facing relegation, it was assumed his brief was to oversee a soft landing into Bundesliga 2 and rebuild the team in the second tier. But Nagelsmann, whose playing ambitions were ended by a knee injury aged 20, had other ideas.

The rookie coach quickly rebuilt the players' shattered confidence, breathing new life into a team previously struck dumb by fear and seemingly resigned to their fate. He remained calm in the eye of the relegation storm, astutely shielding his squad from pressure.

"What he's done is unblock us mentally," said centre-back Niklas Sule. "He knows exactly when to raise his voice and assert his authority and when to be protective of us."


Motivator...driving his Hoffenheim team on

After avoiding the drop, Hoffenheim stormed the 2016-17 season, finishing in the Champions League places and earning Nagelsmann the accolade of Bundesliga coach of the season.

He has fostered squad unity by sharing a training-ground office with his assistants, while also placing great emphasis on the equal treatment of reserve players. There have, however, been problems this season, with his team limp and lifeless in the Europa League and showing signs of fragility on the Bundesliga front too. They have been inconsistent, defensively sloppy and not nearly as clinical in front of goal as they were last season.

To a large extent, Nagelsmann has been toiling against factors beyond his control. A squad too shallow to compete on multiple fronts and players totally out of form, notably forward Andrej Kramaric and centre-back Havard Nordtveit, while striker Sandro Wagner departed for Bayern Munich during the winter break.

It's also as clear as day that the club

Impressive... Hoffenheim beat high-flying RB Leipzig 4-0

Praise...with Bayern boss Jupp Heynckes (left)

are still paying the price for Bayern's summer-time swoop for stopper Sule and midfield linker Sebastian Rudy. The German internationals were the heart and soul of the Hoffenheim operation and simply have not been replaced.

"I like to be honest in what I have to say and have to admit we're in a results crisis," declared Nagelsmann after a 3-0 thumping at Hamburg. "We cannot live off what's happened in the past. We have to get back to reality."

Seven days later, he had the reaction he was looking for as high-flying RB Leipzig were beaten 4-0.

He was linked with the Borussia Dortmund hot-seat when Peter Bosz departed in the autumn. Bayern also remain long-term suitors, with Nagelsmann noted for his knack of taking points off the perennial champions.

Last season, he and his charges took four points from the Bavarians, and in September he once again demonstrated his uncanny ability to outcoach his opposite number when Hoffenheim recorded a fine 2-0 home win over the defending champions.

While Bayern had the lion's share of possession with 72 per cent, they had neither the space or the time to do much with it – and that's exactly what Nagelsmann intended, harassing and stifling Carlo Ancelotti's side, then landing the sucker punch.

Not all of Hoffenheim's heroes against Bayern were listed on the teamsheet. A young ball boy also played his part, his speedy recycling work enabling a quickly taken throw-in which led to the home side's opening goal on 27 minutes. Bayern's protests were in vain. They had been caught sleeping on the job.

"We make a point of educating our ball boys to get the ball back into play quickly," smiled Nagelsmann.

Even with a 5-2 loss to Bayern in January – Bayern bouncing back to win comfortably, including a goal from Wagner against his former side – the scoreline did not tell the whole story. Hoffenheim had stormed into a two-goal lead in the first 12 minutes and Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes was full of praise for Nagelsmann after the match.

Last year Nagelsmann shrugged off links with Bayern, saying: "It's a relatively normal state of affairs. Football is like that. If you're successful, you're built up. The period when judgements are formed is a short one and of course, it can go either way.

"With me it's gone to the positive extreme. If we were to lose a few games, it would go in the other direction.

"It's no secret that I'm very ambitious. I'd like to think that can be seen in training and on matchdays. I want to deliver as much as I can at Hoffenheim. Whether it's enough to win a title remains to be seen."

Bayern are reported to be trying to persuade Heynckes to stay beyond this summer and the club hierarchy is said to be having doubts over Nagelsmann's experience, especially given Hoffenheim's struggles in Europe this season when they lost a Champions League qualifier to Liverpool and then failed to make it out of the Europa League group stage.

But time is on Nagelsmann's side and he will not remain at Hoffenheim forever.

John Holmesdale

> "He knew exactly when to raise his voice and assert his authority and when to be protective of us"
>
> **Ex Hoffenheim centre-back Niklas Sule**

Ariel HOLAN
Once a field-hockey coach, the 53-year-old won the Sudamericana Cup with Independiente last year. Ever innovative in his methods of preparation, notably using a drone to film training.

Adi HUTTER
Highly-rated Austrian whose Young Boys of Bern side have a real chance this season of breaking Basle's Swiss league hegemony.

Niko KOVAC
After a spell in charge of Croatia, the former Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen midfielder is the brains behind Eintracht Frankfurt's push for European qualification.

Manuel BAUM

Helping Augsburg to punch above their weight

A former secondary-school teacher – specialising in sport, business studies and law – the 38-year-old Bavarian has proved a quick learner as a coach. In a poll of German top-flight players, conducted by *Kicker* magazine at New Year, he was listed as the third-best boss in the country, outstripped only by Schalke's impressive young leader Domenico Tedesco and Bayern Munich golden oldie Jupp Heynckes.

Previously Augsburg's head of youth development, Baum has been busy this season making his critics eat their words.

Back in August, more or less every mainstream pundit was picking the Augsburger for the drop, citing the clutch of key players who had left in the summer and a morale-sapping German Cup loss to third-tier Magdeburg on the eve of the new campaign.

Defying the drop ...Augsburg's Baum

However, Baum's side turned out to be anything but no-hopers, losing just five of their 17 games in the Autumn Championship and going into the winter break in ninth place.

Although he normally sets up in a 4-2-3-1 formation, like all astute coaches these days he does like to ring the changes, such as switching to a five or three-man back line. But whatever the shape, the key components remain the same: the high-pressing; hard running and athleticism, with lightning-quick transitions after winning the ball back.

Never without his laptop and setting great store by video analysis, Baum was once employed by Sky Deutschland, either providing research material or appearing in the studio.

"In the way he works he's meticulous, direct and precise," explains Erik Meijer, the former Bayer Leverkusen striker who is now a Sky presenter. "From minute one of a game he has the systems being used all worked out and knows how they can be cracked. For every problem on the pitch he looks for the solution.

> "From minute one of a game he has the systems being used all worked out and knows how they can be cracked"
>
> **Sky presenter and former Leverkusen striker Erik Meijer**

"He's not one to push himself forward. He sees himself working for the common good. I rate him as a coach and a man."

As a young keeper, Baum was good enough to play for the juniors at 1860 Munich. His first taste of senior coaching was at third-tier Unterhaching, where he was an assistant to coach Heiko Herrlich, who now is in charge at Leverkusen. "He had a feeling and an eye for what the opposition was going to do," says Herrlich.

Nick Bidwell

Acknowledged...voted third best coach in the Bundesliga

Paulo FONSECA

Defying the odds with Shakhtar

Having spoken of his desire to work in England, the 44-year-old Mozambique-born boss was strongly linked with Everton not so long ago, only for his employers at Shakhtar to emphatically refuse to come to the negotiating table.

In control since the summer of 2016, he has done a fine job with Shakhtar, setting the wheels in motion for a Ukraine league and cup double last term and their qualification for the last 16 of this term's Champions League – a campaign in which they were especially impressive in their two games with Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, when they were unlucky to lose 2-0 at the Etihad and won the return fixture 2-1. Resolute in defence and tactically disciplined, they even managed to outpass City.

> "They are one of the best teams I've ever come up against...they are extremely well-organised defensively and their build-up play is amazing"
> **Pep Guardiola on Fonseca's Shakhtar**

It's a rare moment indeed when Guardiola is outwitted, but for much of those 180-plus minutes it was Fonseca and Shakhtar calling the shots, crowding out City in midfield and masterfully retaining possession.

The goal by Shakhtar left-back Ismaily in the victory over City in Kharkiv was a perfect illustration of Fonseca's fluid-football philosophy. A move consisting of 24 consecutive touches in 76 seconds, it was a sequence of short balls, passing triangles and heads-up awareness.

As a self-confessed Guardiola fan, Fonseca would have been delighted to hear City's manager shower his team with praise, stating: "[Shakhtar] are one of the best teams I've ever come up against. They have a fantastic dynamic. They have great players, they are extremely well organised defensively and their build-up play is amazing. They are a machine."

Fonseca first began to show his tactical acumen in the 2012-13 season at unfashionable Portuguese outfit Pacos Ferreira, steering them to a third-place finish in the league and a Champions League play-off slot.

Suitably impressed, champions Porto brought him on board but he never really got to grips with the job and was fired in March 2013. Revitalised back at Pacos, he then went to Braga, where he enjoyed a success-packed 2015-16 campaign in which his side won the Portuguese Cup and reached the quarter-finals of the Europa League.

Once a solid, reliable centre-back with Leca, Belenenses, Maritimo and Estrela Amadora, his first leadership role was with the Estrela youth team.

Nick Bidwell

Astute...Guardiola praised Fonseca's organisation

Top notch...Shakhtar (in white) take on Manchester City

Razvan LUCESCU
A chip off the old block, he is the son of Romanian technical area wizard Mircea Lucescu. Enjoying considerable success in his first season at the helm of PAOK in Greece.

Jose-Luis MENDILIBAR
The man responsible for the Eibar fairy story, the small town Basque club which has taken La Liga by storm in recent times.

PEPA
A former Benfica youth coach, he has been instrumental in turning little Tondela into a much-respected top-flight force in Portugal.

Sunday OLISEH

Pioneering African in Europe

Technically, Mario Wilson was the first black African to coach a club in Europe, and his tenures in charge of both Portugal's national side and Benfica are almost as high as one can achieve.

However, Wilson, who died in 2016, aged 86, may have been born in colonial Mozambique but he spent all of his adult life in Portugal and was completely integrated into European football.

So too 48-year-old Lito Vidigal, who was most recently in charge of struggling CD Aves and has also coached Portuguese sides Portimonense, Uniao Leiria and Belenenses, as well as having spells in Cyprus and Israel. Angolan-born but brought up in Portugal – where he played all his club football – Vidigal elected to play for the country of his birth and would therefore later become the first African international to coach a top-flight side in Europe.

The latest groundbreaker for African coaches in Europe is Sunday Oliseh who, in his first major club job, was chasing promotion to the Eredivisie in Holland with Fortuna Sittard. That was until a fall-out with the club's board, which resulted in the Nigerian being suspended from his duties.

The 43-year-old joined Sittard a year ago when they were one place off the bottom of the second tier. And after losing just one of his first nine games in charge, he successfully led them to safety.

> "Some people – not all – believe that, as an African, with any success you achieve, or position you attain, you are not in your rightful place. You belong lower"
>
> Sunday Oliseh

This season the oldest professional team in Holland have been among the Dutch second-tier frontrunners, elevating the stock of the 1998 Word Cup star who is remembered for his long-range goal against Spain at the finals in France and as one of Nigeria's Olympic gold-medal winners two years earlier.

Oliseh proved something of a catalyst in his playing days too, as the first Nigerian to play in Serie A – where he played for Reggiana and Juventus – and also enjoying distinguished spells at Cologne, Ajax, and Borussia Dortmund, before finishing his career with Genk in Belgium, where he has lived ever since.

Thoughtful...Oliseh

After working as a youth coach for a decade, he graduated with a UEFA Pro Licence through the Football Association in England but found getting a job at a European club almost impossible.

"The blunt truth is you run into some people – and I repeat the word 'some' people, not all – who believe that, as an African, with any success you achieve, or position you attain, you are not in your rightful place. You belong lower," he says.

"They will never accept the fact that sometimes you have better knowledge than them in the job; you have better knowledge than them as regards how football should be played. Even if you played at the highest level, they believe it was because of talent but not because of the cerebral part. They feel that as an African you shouldn't be there.

"But I repeat again, it's some people, because if everyone thought like that then I wouldn't have this job. If they thought like that I wouldn't be part of the FIFA technical committee. They are some. They are few. But sometimes they are ones who make the decisions.

"It affects your progression. But as an African what do we do? Do we just buckle down and accept it? For me to succeed, I know I have to do three to four times the work a 'normal' person must do."

Oliseh went back to Nigeria as national coach in 2015, but resigned by e-mail after eight months, saying he was not enjoying the experience. He headed back to his base in Eupen – and then came the chance of a job just 40 minutes by car from his home.

Respect...he has made relegation battlers into promotion chasers

"A colleague and a friend of mine gave me a call because he knew I was trying to find clubs to coach," he explains. "He said to me, 'hey, it's risky, it's dangerous, it's a club near extinction, financially in trouble and not doing well in the sporting aspect either. But they might need a change'. I told him, 'OK I'm interested, let me see what I can do'.

"He said to me, 'let me make a call' but I said 'no, I will make the call'. He was surprised because normally it's agents or managers who make the calls. So I made the call and immediately they said they wanted to meet me.

Focused... Oliseh turned things around

"We also had players here who were just coming for their retirement, far too relaxed, so I promoted younger players and I made it very clear to those players with ideas of a pension that approach was not going to work with me. I played the youngsters and they just went at it and the results followed."

Now he is attracting considerable attention but admits: "I've worked hard, like mad. I'm conscious of the fact it's a make-or-break opportunity. I'm not only a coach here, I try to be a psychologist to the players, a brother figure, a father figure to the younger ones.

"I know success here will open, at least, the eye of Europe to what an African coach can do. That's why I feel blessed at the publicity I have been getting with people coming from around the world, coming to see what's happening and what is an African coach doing."

Unfortunately, Oliseh ran into problems with Sittard's eccentric Turkish owner, Isitan Gun, particularly over player recruitment. That prompted Oliseh's controversial suspension, which he refused to see as a sacking.

"Sometimes I come in the dressing room and there is suddenly a new player," says Oliseh. "There is a lot we can do, but at the same time we are highly limited.

"We are renting our training ground. With the players too, I have to work with very limited resources.

"We have to look at whether the club is willing to be promoted. Are they ready for it? That's another matter. I've been asked this question repeatedly, daily for the last months now. People are excited and surprised that we are where we are. But we have to wait and see."

Mark Gleeson

High hopes...Sittard celebrate a goal in the Eerste Divisie

"I told them, 'I believe I can help you guys out of the position you are in'. At the time it was so bad the club had one point from 10 games. For the supporters, for the city, it was like it was doomsday.

"So when I got the job, from the first day on, I had to change the way players looked at things; bring some optimism, put some light into the place and make it clear hard work would be key. We won the first game, against the side who were below us – we were second to last. By beating them we immediately created a six-point gap. That's how it started and I just kept the team focused."

But it was not easy, says Oliseh, as again he found unnecessary hurdles placed in his path.

"I had many difficulties, some tough situations," he continues. "The existing coaching staff were so antagonistic but I just kept my cool. What helped a lot was my experience from the national team of Nigeria. I just handled it in a calm way.

WILLY SAGNOL
Charismatic former Bayern Munich and France full-back, whose coaching c.v. includes stints in charge of the French Under 21s and Bordeaux.

MAURICE STEIJN
Steered cash-strapped VVV to the Dutch second division crown last season. Always stresses the need to have brave players of good character.

JUAN CARLOS UNZUE
Former goalkeeper who served for three years as Luis Enrique's assistant at Barcelona. Now breathing new life into Celta Vigo.

Thierry LAUREY

Promotion specialist leading the Strasbourg revival

Some accuse him of being overly abrasive; others believe his straight-talking does more harm than good. But does it really matter when the coach in question has such an obvious talent for delivering teams that are worth far more than the sum of their parts?

A former midfielder with Marseille, Montpellier and Sochaux, he specialises in taking unfancied sides to new heights, leading Corsican side GFC Ajaccio from the third tier to Ligue 1 in just two years and winning the Ligue 2 title last season with newly-promoted Strasbourg – an amazing achievement for a club which went bankrupt in 2011 and very nearly disappeared altogether.

Back in the top flight for the first time in nine years, Strasbourg won just three of their opening 15 league games this season. But they are breathing much easier now, showing much more of a killer instinct and benefitting enormously from their coach's knack for the right tactical tweak at the right time.

Laurey has put together an energised band of brothers and this was very much in evidence when they beat Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 in December – the first time that the runaway league leaders had bitten the dust this term.

It was a result which shocked French football. Yet, true to form, Laurey refused to go overboard. "We played well," he acknowledged. "We had little bit of luck. We have to admit it. The result could have gone either way.

"To beat such a team the planets have to be aligned and you have to perform to your absolute maximum. My lads fought like lions. I'm proud to be coach of this side. If we don't become carried away, we can stay up."

On the training ground he is not necessarily the easiest to deal with. He is a perfectionist for whom every detail counts, someone who cannot or will not suffer fools gladly.

"During a session, he can have some really harsh words for a player," recalls former GFCA goalkeeper Clement Maury. "That does not stop him having a joke a few minutes later with the very same guy.

"He just wants to make his players and team better. He gets straight to the point. He does not go around the houses."

> "I'm proud to be coach of this side. If we don't become carried away, we can stay up"

Tactically he seems to have evolved of late. For the vast bulk of his coaching career he was known for his devotion to a 4-4-2 featuring a midfield diamond, but this term he has enjoyed success with a 4-3-3, 4-1-4-1 or 4-3-1-2. As a rule of thumb, he wants his team to grasp the initiative, to be incisive and direct in its attacking play.

For Laurey, it's all about results. As he said last year: "The objective in this game is not to keep possession and have the biggest number of completed passes."

Nick Bidwell

Beaten...PSG's Presnel Kimpembe struggles to contain Stephane Bahoken of Strasbourg

Tweak...talking tactics with Strasbourg defender Ernest Seka

Massimo ODDO

World Cup winner breathing new life into Udinese

The new boss of the *Zebrette* was a member of Italy's World Cup winning squad in 2006, enjoyed a playing career as a highly regarded right-back for Napoli, Lazio and Milan, and is now considered one of the brightest football thinkers in the country.

Oddo has only been in the Udinese hot seat for a few months – appointed in November after the under-performing Luigi Delneri was told to clear his desk – but what a difference he has made, winning seven of his first eight Serie A fixtures to lift the mood in the camp.

It was his formidable drive and spirit which effectively took him to the top as a player and, not surprisingly, his Udinese side also boasts similar qualities. He was never one to be intimidated by a challenge and nor are his new charges.

> "I don't have a magic wand. I and my assistants do our job, but it's the players who have to go out on the pitch and deliver"

"What we've tried to do here is to increase the amount of enthusiasm around the place," he explains. "That's a vital ingredient in any dressing room. That said, we mustn't get over-excited.

"There's a danger of becoming complacent and making mistakes. I don't have a magic wand. I and my assistants do our job, but it's the players who have to go out on the pitch and deliver."

Capped 34 times, he is proving to be a canny tactician. His first act at Udinese was to change Delneri's 4-4-2 into a deep-sitting 3-5-2 and the benefits have been manifold: an improved defensive unit, more control in midfield and a greater counter-attacking threat.

For Oddo it's been a case of horses for courses; of finding the right shape for a young group fizzing with energy, power and endurance. On that basis, the switch to 3-5-2 made itself, declaring: "I have my ideas but I'm no fundamentalist. At Pescara last season I used a 4-2-3-1. My ideal type of football is all about winning the ball back straight away.

"Playing well doesn't depend on the system. What counts is the capacity of the players to perform the tasks they are asked to do. As long as you have a collective which works, the individual quality will blossom."

Prior to coming to Udinese, he worked at the Pescara club in his home region of Abruzzo, first taking charge of the youth team then being handed the first-team reins in May 2015. A year later, he led them to Serie A with a play-off victory over Trapani. Sadly there would be no happy ending and he was sacked the following spring after a disastrous run of top-flight results: not one single victory in 24 games. A deeply painful experience, though one he clearly has learnt from.

One thing you can always be sure of with Oddo is an interesting take on all matters football. Such as when discussing Italy's non-qualification for Russia 2018.

"While missing out on the World Cup is an enormous disappointment, from a certain point of view, some good could come out of it," he told *La Repubblica*.

"Our World Cup win in 2006 was in effect our biggest defeat. We saw ourselves as number one and didn't feel the need to make any changes. Defeats encourage you to take a different path.

"I hope we can bounce back from this setback with new ideas."

Nick Bidwell

Spirit...the mood has changed at Udinese since his arrival

Mitchell VAN DER GAAG
One of the most promising young tacticians in the Eredivisie. Few Dutch teams are as well-drilled, compact and resilient as his Excelsior side.

Patrick VIEIRA
Following a stellar playing career, the former Arsenal and France midfield colossus has revealed genuine leadership ability at New York City FC.

Facetoface

BERNARDO SILVA

"To be trained by Guardiola and to play alongside so many great players...that was the reason I chose City"

The Portuguese midfielder talks about leaving Monaco for the Premier League and his country's chances at the World Cup this summer

Why did you go to Manchester City when you left Monaco in the summer?
I chose City because, first of all, after all the amazing achievements at Monaco, I thought it was the best moment to change and try something different. I had just won the French league. I had played for three years at Monaco and we reached the quarter-finals and, last season, the semi-finals of the Champions League. I chose City because it's a pleasure to be in one of the best leagues in the world, if not the best. Then it seemed to be a great opportunity to be trained by [Pep] Guardiola, and to play alongside so many great players and learn from them every day.

Was working with Guardiola a big incentive?
Definitely. Everyone knows that he is one of the best coaches in the world – the way he thinks football, the way he feels the game, the passion. I wanted to be able to learn from him every day and work with him.

How does he differ from your previous coach, Leonardo Jardim?
All coaches are different. Jardim is a great coach. He gave me the opportunity to play at a high level. I am thankful for that. He is a coach who has this great ability to work and develop young players and give them the opportunity to play at a good level. I am very grateful for all the work that he has done with me over the last three years. I wish him all the best. He is a great coach. He has been doing a great job with Monaco.

Has Jardim been the most important coach in your career so far?
Probably, yes. I was with him for three years, so I spent most of my professional career with him. My time in Monaco was a happy time. I learned a lot from him at Monaco. He is special to me.

What are the qualities and characteristics of your game that you feel you developed most at Monaco?
When you play at the level of the French league and the Champions League one important thing is the pressure: how to handle pressure and how to handle big games. Over time, I began handling it better. Nowadays, that is very important.

Last season Monaco won Ligue 1 for the first time in 17 years...
It was probably one of the best, if not the best, seasons in Monaco's history. We were, and still are, very proud to win the league against Paris Saint-Germain, which is such a strong team and has power in France – and in Europe today as well. It was wonderful to reach the semi-finals [of the Champions League] and eliminate Manchester City, Dortmund and Tottenham Hotspur. It was an amazing run and I will always remember that season as one of the best in my career.

Big deal...Silva joined City for a reported £43.5m

What was the secret of that Monaco side, which scored a record 107 league goals?
It was the mental aspect. When you start winning games you have to remain hungry and try to win even more games. That's what we did. At the start, no one believed that we could become the champions or reach the semi-finals [of the Champions League]. We had a lot of young players who wanted to win titles and do big things. We were able to achieve great things and that was the secret: to always be hungry to win titles and win even more.

How have you adapted to

MANCHESTER
CITY

life in England so far?
It's been great to be in Manchester. It's very different. The players and staff received me very well. I am adapting little by little. I am feeling more and more comfortable. I hope that I can help the team as much as possible to win as many titles as we can.

Next season David Silva will turn 33. You have the same profile, same style, same left foot and even the same height. Can you become his successor?
I do hope so. David [Silva] is a great player, one of the best midfielders in the world. If one day I could reach his level it would be great. He is a very important player for Manchester City. As I said, it's a pleasure to train with these kind of players and learn from them every day.

What have you learned from Guardiola so far?
All the small details – the way he understands football and the passion he puts into the game. Everything is so important. With Guardiola you learn every day – tactically, physically, mentally – and to know how to deal with all the situations in the game.

He demands attacking and defending in all the game phases...
In football today, the new generation and the new football that we play, everyone has to defend and attack. Everyone has to be prepared to recover the ball as fast as possible when you lose it. That is what we try to do and that is what Guardiola wants us to do – to keep the ball when we have possession and score. When we don't have it, to press high and recover it as fast as we can.

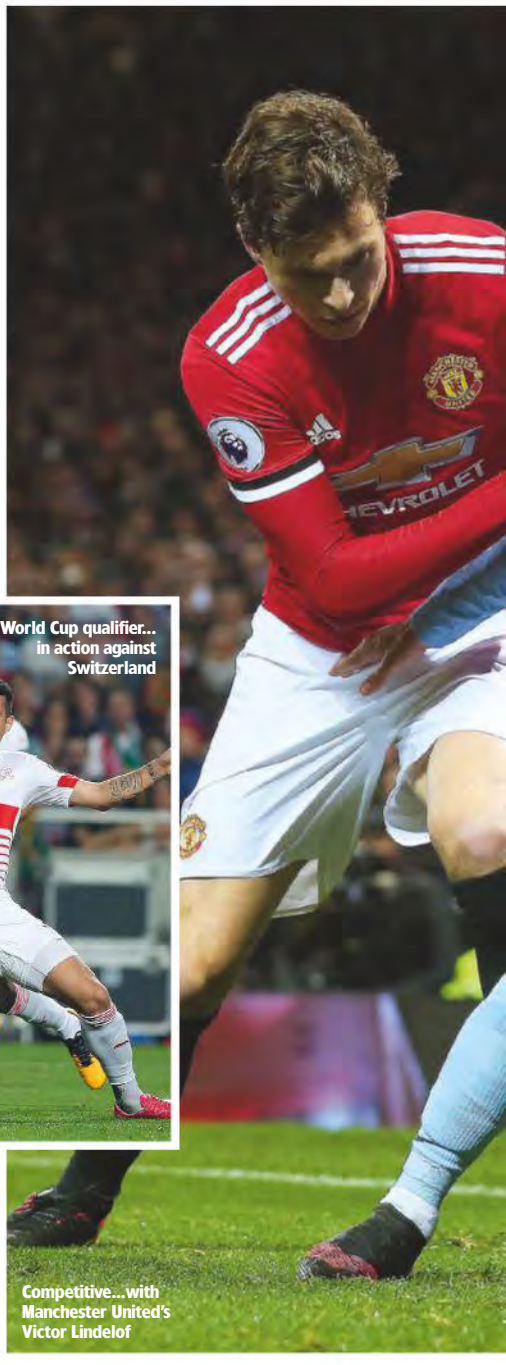
Is chess an adequate comparison for the game that he envisages?
He thinks about everything. He likes to have intelligent players, to go into all the small details and to plan everything, so, yes, a little bit. When you are a player and you know exactly what to do – when you have the ball, when you don't have the ball, when it's a corner, a free-kick, whatever the situation is – it helps the team to get results when you know how to react. It's one of his biggest strengths.

Are Manchester City favourites for the Premier League?
A little bit. We have eight points more than Manchester United and nine, 10, 11, 12 points more than the rest. Manchester City are slight favourites, but in the Premier League you never know. All the teams are so strong. You can always drop points, wherever you go, whoever you play. We will do our best to keep going this way and to keep winning our games.

Are your Manchester rivals the only team capable of catching you this season?
Manchester United are a strong team. They are playing a good season. There is Chelsea and Tottenham, who play great football. Manchester United will be a tough team to beat, but that also goes for Chelsea and Tottenham. All the players are playing the way he [Jose Mourinho] wants it in his second season and they have adapted. It's working well for Mourinho. He is doing a good job. Mourinho has his way of watching the game and his teams are always very competitive. They defend very well and always want to win.

World Cup qualifier... in action against Switzerland

The Manchester clubs are on the different end of the style spectrum...
Yes, all these teams have the quality of defending well and trying not to concede. Then they counter-attack and try to grab control of the game. Manchester United is a very physical team with [Romelu] Lukaku. It's a very competitive team. City has a different style of play. We like to have the ball and control the game, to not let our opponent have the ball and come close to our goal. The two different styles have been successful this season.


Competitive...with Manchester United's Victor Lindelof

Can City win the Champions League?
It's a different competition. You never know what will happen in the knockout phase. All details are important – a penalty, an offside goal, a red card – in the knockout games. You always have to be very focused. You have to be lucky as well to win this kind of competition, with great teams like Barcelona, Madrid, Munich, Juventus, PSG and teams from other countries.

Last season, with Monaco, you eliminated City in the round of 16...
I wasn't at Manchester City the last few years, but it's true that last season, at Monaco, we eliminated Manchester City. They had a good team. This team is better prepared for all the difficulties that you can face in the Champions League. As I said, you have always to be focused and details are very important. Monaco was winning 2-1 at the Etihad [Stadium] last season, then we were winning 3-2, but in the end we lost 5-3, conceding goals from free-kicks,

Supporter...playing for Benfica

"Benfica was an important stage in my life – all the people, the team-mates, the fans that helped me"

Favourite...the Premier League is City's to lose

corners and in the last minutes. All the details are important when you play the Champions League.

Does the World Cup speak more to your imagination than the Champions League?
Both competitions are very important, as you can imagine. The Champions League is the most important competition at club level. That is true for the World Cup at international level. It's a very special competition because it happens only once every four years. To win one or another would be great. It's not easy to win these competitions, but when you talk about the World Cup it is special because it comes around only every four years. I hope I don't have an injury and that Portugal can do a good job.

In 2016 you were sidelined from Euro 2016 and Portugal's biggest-ever triumph due to injury. How difficult was that?
It was a bit difficult, not to be able to help the team. It was great for Portugal to win our first international title and to see all my friends winning it for the country. I was a bit sad not to be there, but it was great for Portugal.

Do you think the criticism of Portugal for playing defensive football was justified?
It's true that it was a little bit defensive and counter-attacking, but what matters is that Portugal won the title. It was the first international title for the country and in five years time no one will remember how Portugal won it. What people will remember is that Portugal won the title.

Education...Silva learns from Guardiola (right) every day

A year later, Portugal reached the semi-finals of the Confederations Cup. How was your first major tournament?
It was great to play for my country in an important competition. Unfortunately we couldn't get past Chile in the semi-finals after a penalty shoot-out. It was a good competition and it was good to adapt to the Russian pitches and atmosphere, where we will play this summer.

What's your opinion of VAR?
If it helps the referees to make correct decisions, it's good for football. Everyone today talks about referees and the bad decisions. If VAR can help and let people concentrate on the game – to be passionate about the game and not the referee and his decisions – it will be good.

What is a realistic target for Portugal at the World Cup?
I'd like to think that it's realistic to win the World Cup. When you get to Russia, you can win or not. We will do our best to win it.

What is the meaning behind your tattoo, "*E pluribus unum*"?
I spent 12 years at Benfica. It was an important stage in my life: all the people, the team-mates, the fans that helped me. I spent most of my life there. I felt I had to make something that would always make me remember about it. It means "Out of many, one". Benfica is the club that I have always supported.

You went to university but didn't graduate. Will you return to university after your football career?
You never know. Today I am not thinking about it. I still have so many years in front of me in football. I am focused on football, but when I am done we will see what happens. Perhaps after my career I can remain in football as a coach or a manager.

Interview by Samindra Kunti

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

WORDS: Sid Lowe

The Magic

He took time to become a key figure at Real Madrid – but his future is far from certain

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It was a Thursday morning in February and the headline was shocking. Splashed across the front of one of Madrid's two sports dailies were huge yellow letters spelling out a stark and simple message in capitals: "ZIDANE WANTS TO SELL ISCO."

All across Spain, it was easy to imagine people picking up their paper and thinking: "You what? Isco? Now?"

One man who might not have been quite so surprised was Francisco Roman Alarcon Suarez himself. "When you get it right, you're God," said Isco two months previously. "But when you fail four or five ▸

Timeline

NOV 15, 2009
Scores the only goal of the game as Spain beat Colombia to finish third at the Under-17 World Cup.

NOV 11, 2010
Makes his first appearance for Valencia and scores twice in a 4-1 Spanish Cup victory over Logrones.

NOV 14, 2010
Comes on for the final 20 minutes against Getafe for his debut in La Liga.

JUL 11, 2011
Malaga activate a €6million buyout clause and sign him from Valencia.

AUG 14, 2011
In the Spain side that loses on spot-kicks to Brazil in the quarter-finals of the Under-20 World Cup.

NOV 21, 2011
Scores his first goal for Malaga in a 3–1 win away to Racing Santander.

passes, they want to get you out."

He always knew that something like this could come and he knew that it had been close before. He knows that things change quickly in football. But, still...

At first glance, the news was hard to believe – and not just because the TV show that broke the story doesn't exactly have the best reputation. The story was quickly rubbished by Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane but the programme is very close to club president Florentino Perez and often does his bidding for him.

Isco has always been talented. He's always had that walk, too: legs bent inwards, backside hanging beneath his body. "I've got twisted feet," he has admitted. One of the scouts that first signed him describes him as "*culón*" – in other words, he has a big arse.

When he was a kid he took a ball everywhere with him and claimed that his football came from the streets – not so different as a professional as it had been when he was little. "What I want is the ball," he says – which was sometimes a problem as his coaches often wanted him to be more serious, more dedicated, more practical. But while that may still be the case at times, there is no doubting that talent.

"He's capable of doing things that very few people can do," says Zidane – and if anyone knows a thing or two about rare talent it is him.

Zidane was once asked if he saw himself in Isco. Maybe he had to say this, but he said "yes". Carlo Ancelotti had said much the same thing, insisting that, one day, Isco could be "very close" to Zidane.

> "Ever since we were kids we used to say to ourselves: 'If he doesn't make it, we'll never know anyone who does'"
>
> **A childhood team-mate**

The question was always, when would that day arrive and would he be given the opportunity to prove that he could emulate the Frenchman?

His team-mates have always thought he could and in the Real Madrid dressing room his nickname is "*Magia*". Let's face it, you've got to be pretty bloody good for that in a dressing room containing Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema, Luca Modric and suchlike.

Real full-back Dani Carvajal describes him as "pure fantasy", and in a time of athleticism there is something more aesthetic about Isco. Slower, sure, but a little bit special.

When he was young he played for Atletico Benamiel on gravel pitches not far from Malaga, where a childhood team-mate insists: "He was always capable of doing magic. It didn't matter if it was on the pitch or walking back home from school, there was always a ball at his feet.

"Ever since we were kids we used to say to ourselves: 'If he doesn't make it, we'll never know anyone who does.'

"You could see he was special. The funny thing was, at the time there were scouts constantly watching him but no one used to call him.

"People used to say because of the bandy legs, or he's too slow."

Not all of them, however, were so swift to dismiss him. Valencia came for Isco and then, at 19, Malaga. Valencia had not always been sure – he didn't fit the aggressive approach they wanted and they feared that the fantasy was offered up in lieu of fitness. Malaga, meanwhile, was an attractive option: not only were they his home-town team, they were also building

Signing on..with Real Madrid president Florentino Perez

Raw talent...scoring in the Under-17 World Cup

JUL 26, 2012
Plays against Japan in the first of three appearances for Spain at the Olympic Games in London.

SEP 18, 2012
Scores twice in a 3–0 win at home to Zenit in Malaga's first-ever game in the Champions League group stage.

DEC 22, 2012
Gets the opening goal as Malaga win 3–2 to beat Real Madrid for the first time in 29 years.

FEB 6, 2013
Makes his senior international debut, as a sub in a 3–1 win over Uruguay in Doha, Qatar.

MAR 13, 2013
On target in a 2-0 win at home to Porto that puts Malaga in the Champions League quarter-finals.

up – even if there was a nagging doubt that Pellegrini tried to play upon: just how much would he play?

The answer, eventually, was "always". Well, for a while, at least – and certainly when Madrid were at their very best, achieving something that even the most decorated club in world football had not achieved for 59 years in winning La Liga and the Champions Cup.

But it took a very, very long time for that moment to arrive. And then not very long for it to go way again.

On one level, that was natural enough; after all, the competition for places at Madrid is fierce as the squad contains the very best in the world. And when you've got Bale, Benzema and Ronaldo to fit into a side, a enforced preference for 4-3-3 means that Isco's preferred position as a kind of no10 doesn't even exist. Although he played two Champions League Finals, both of them were as a substitute – though it is often forgotten just how impressive he was against Atletico Madrid in 2016.

Then there were the doubts about his own performances. While most would not agree with the former Madrid player Ivan Helguera – who claimed last year that Isco doesn't provide assists, doesn't win the ball and doesn't give as much as he could, complaining that with one trick he has the fans eating out of his hand –

a side to challenge Real Madrid and Barcelona. The coach, Manuel Pellegrini, was enamoured of him and later did all he could to take Isco to Manchester City with him.

That Malaga side didn't last for long – the team was soon torn down, the assets stripped and sold off – but they did reach the Champions League semi-finals. Playing with freedom just behind the centre-forward, Isco was superb as Malaga played with possession and patience, accumulating men inside before giving him the ball to feet.

That summer there were options. Isco was a Barcelona fan as a kid and has a labrador called Messi, but when Real Madrid came for him his mind was made

Stunning...taking on Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League quarter-finals with Malaga

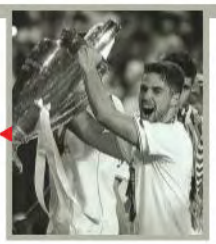
Impressive..in action for Valencia against Manchester United

JUN 18, 2013
Scores a penalty as Spain beat Italy 4-2 to win the European Under-21 Championship.

JUN 26, 2013
Agrees a five-year deal with Real Madrid and becomes new coach Carlo Ancelotti's first signing.

AUG 18, 2013
Scores the winning goal on his Real Madrid debut in a 2-1 victory at home to Real Betis.

MAY 24, 2014
Comes on as a sub and plays 60 minutes of Real's 4-1 Champions League Final victory over Atletico Madrid.



NOV 15, 2014
Scores his first goal for Spain, in a 3-0 European qualifier against Belarus.

Europe's best... lifting the 2016 Champions League

they might have conceded that there was something in the question, "what do his moves end up as?" Asked about Isco recently, Xavi replied with a question of his own: "How many tricks and flicks does Messi do?"

Isco admits: "I'm not stupid. If I have not been a starter with Ancelotti, Benitez and Zidane, it's my fault." But it is also about being given the chance to show what he can do and the need for continuity – and that eventually came late last season.

"Bale got injured and there I was ready to take advantage of my opportunity," says Isco.

Going into the Champions League quarter-final second leg with Bayern Munich, 21 players in Real Madrid's squad had played more minutes than him. But after that he played every game all the way through to the Final, and he played regularly in the league, too.

Zidane shifted the shape of the side, playing Isco in a midfield role behind the strikers in which he was outstanding, producing the best football of his career, being effective as well as aesthetic. The team benefitted too, gaining control and creativity, more balance, and a way through sides that sat deep and sought to blunt what had become Madrid's traditional weapon of choice: the counter-attack.

He looked sharp, fit, slimmer and faster than before. Decisive too, with goals and assists came with virtually every match. You could genuinely make a case for him being the best player in La Liga in the second half of the season.

On the way to a league and European Cup double, Isco was thinking over a new contract offer from Madrid. With Barcelona waiting in the wings, he had not intended to sign it, fearful of how much football he was going to get. But the last two months made up his mind and he signed a deal until 2022, with a €700million buyout clause.

"I don't feel like a starter because at Madrid we all are, and the manager can only play 11, but I do feel important," he said. And that was what he needed most of all, what he had been seeking. For the first time he went into a campaign thinking he had found himself.

"I have grown as a footballer," he explained. "I have improved, I score more goals than before because I play nearer the area and 'Zizou' has been very important for that. I'm playing further forward, where I have played my whole life and where I can provide assists.

"Zidane knows me well and knows how to get the best out of me. As for me, I had the patience to wait when I didn't have the opportunities I wanted."

Local hero...playing for Spain against Costa Rica in Malaga

When asked what has changed, Zidane answered: "Just confidence. He knows that he is an important player. He plays as if he was in the street and I like that because he doesn't worry when things don't come off. He is very comfortable on the pitch. I'm pleased that we're seeing a better Isco every day."

At last, it seemed, Isco had made it and his form this term continued to impress, even though Madrid didn't. Away to Girona he was the one bright spot in a poor team performance and that was far from unique. He, almost alone, was blameless as weeks passed.

The national team confirmed that, with coach Julen Lopetegui stating: "His effort is clearer each day. He's no longer that kid that stands watching during games. His body and mind have changed bit by bit." Against Italy, at the Bernabeu, he ran the game and scored twice. Facing Costa Rica in Malaga, his home town, the stadium chanted: "Isco! Isco! Isco!" As one paper put it: "When Isco starts to play,

> "He plays as if he was in the street and I like that because he doesn't worry when things don't come off. He is very comfortable on the pitch"
>
> Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane

DEC 16, 2014
Scores in a 4-0 semi-final win against Cruz Azul as Real Madrid go on to win the Club World Cup.

NOV 21, 2015
Sent off for a foul on Neymar as Real Madrid lose 4-0 at home to Barcelona.

MAY 28, 2016
Is a second-half substitute as Real beat Atletico Madrid on penalties in the Champions League Final.

JUN 3, 2017
In the starting line-up as Real Madrid beat Juventus and become the first team to retain the Champions League.

AUG 8, 2017
Named man of the match after scoring in a 2-1 victory over Manchester United in the UEFA Super Cup.

SEP 14, 2017
Signs a new deal with Real Madrid that should keep him at the club until June 2022.

Guide...advice from Real boss Zinedine Zidane

football enters into a dimension where most of us mere mortals start drooling."

Slowly, though, Isco started to slip from prominence. With Madrid struggling to find form, Zidane sought other solutions and Isco sat out the *clasico*. The return to fitness of Bale means a return to a front three and the disappearance of Isco's role once again.

Isco had always feared that was a possibility but must have felt he deserved a first-team place. And it would be natural, given his impact since last spring, to believe he would be accommodated.

Without that, he might have resisted signing his contract in the summer.

At 25 he was entitled to think that he had reached the very top and that headline probably hurt. The idea that Real Madrid might sell Isco when he at last had become the player they always knew he could be seemed baffling, just when he led them to the most successful season in their history.

However, reaching the top is one thing; staying there quite another, especially at Madrid. Even when you're Magic. WS

Isco

the numbers game

SPAIN

24

CAPS

GOALS

7

TRANSFERS

€6m
VALENCIA to **MALAGA** (2011)

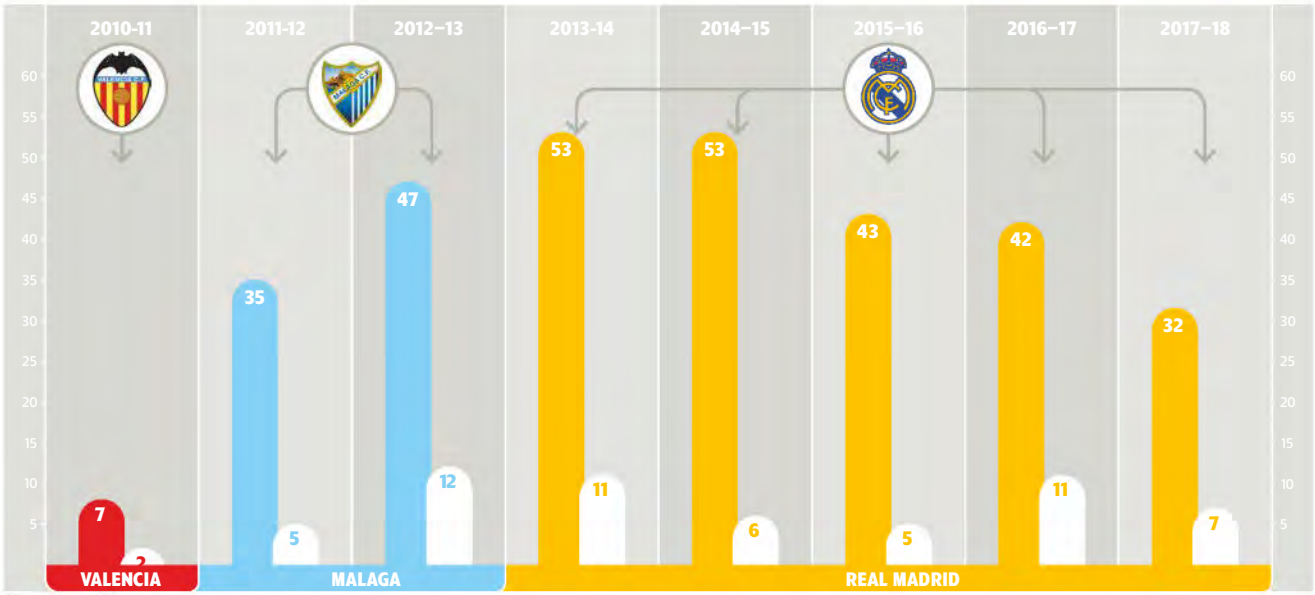
€30
MALAGA to **REAL MADRID** (2013)

GOLDEN BOY AWARD

The top under-21 playing in Europe, as voted for by a panel of journalists

2011	**Mario Gotze**	(Borussia Dortmund)
2012	**Isco**	(Malaga)
2013	**Paul Pogba**	(Juventus)
2014	**Raheem Sterling**	(Liverpool)
2015	**Anthony Martial**	(Monaco/Manchester United)
2016	**Renato Sanches**	(Benfica/Bayern Munich)
2017	**Kylian Mbappe**	(Monaco/Paris Saint-Germain)

HONOURS



GAMES GOALS *(up to & inc10.02.18)*

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

LIGUE 1 PROSPECTS

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

MALCOM

Age 20 (26.02.97), winger, Bordeaux & Brazil

In a sentence
Valued in the €50-60million bracket, the game-changing winger could have been at Arsenal or Tottenham Hotspur if the Bordeaux president, Stephane Martin, had not refused to let him go during January's transfer window.

What they say
French TV commentator Yann Riou: "Everything he does is about instinct, talent and even arrogance. He's an individualist. He always plays on the edge."

Former French international midfielder and Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Fernandez: "He's so influential and gives Bordeaux an extra dimension. He oozes quality, strength and, on the ball, makes it all look too easy."

Brazil coach Tite, who used to be his boss at Corinthians: "He's one of the players we're looking at. He's maturing, his approach play is better and he has improved his finishing. He's young, a boy, but is making great progress."

3 THREE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MALCOM

- He was named after his dad's hero, African-American human rights activist Malcolm X.
- Back in December 2014, Marseille were keen to sign him and even invited him to have a look around the club. Sadly for OM, they opted to pass on the teenager.
- The former Brazil midfielder Ze Roberto played a key role in his move to France, advising Bordeaux coach Willy Sagnol to snap him up.

The story so far
Born in Sao Paulo, Malcom Filipe Silva de Oliveira came through the youth ranks at Corinthians and made his first-team debut in September 2014, scoring his first top-flight goal the same month in a 1-1 draw with Chapecoense. A regular starter by the end of 2015, he helped the club to win the league that year and was rumoured to be on the radar of Roma, Internazionale, Borussia Dortmund, Marseille, Chelsea and Dynamo Kiev. However, he chose to make Bordeaux his European launch pad and signed for them in January 2016. Yet to be capped at full international level, he has extensive experience with the Brazil under-20 side and was a runner-up at the 2015 world finals in New Zealand.

The next step
Despite having three-and-a-half years left on his current contract, the smart money has to be on him moving to England at the end of this season. On and off the pitch, Bordeaux are in a state of flux at the moment and the club's board will be sorely tempted to take the money and run, using the much-needed windfall to buy three or four new players.

> "He's one of the players we're looking at. He's maturing, his approach play is better and he has improved his finishing"
> Brazil coach Tite

Strengths
Able to go past defenders with speed, trickery and a velvety touch, he has a wand of a left foot. Boasts a magnificent range of pass and can control the tempo of a game. Prefers to be used on the right flank but also can deliver as a left-winger or second striker.

Weaknesses
Not the most consistent or defensively disciplined, he can be subject to mood swings. Heading the ball is a task for others.

Abdoulaye TOURE

Age 24 (03.03.94), midfielder, Nantes & France
Under coach Claudio Ranieri, the midfield holder has come on in leaps and bounds. A ferocious ball-winner, he is aerially dominant and much more assured in his distribution than he used to be. He has represented France in several youth categories.

Martin TERRIER

Age 21 (04.03.97), striker, Strasbourg (on loan from Lyon) & France
Skilful and intelligent, he looks the part either as a central striker or a left-winger. Began the season on loan at Strasbourg from Lille, only to sign for Lyon in an €11m deal in January before being loaned back to the Alsace club.

Nordi MUKIELE

Age 20 (01.11.97), defender, Montpellier & France
Quick, strong in the air and comfortable on the ball, the centre-half was signed from second-tier Laval in the January 2017 transfer window and is currently being watched by the likes of Chelsea, Roma and RB Leipzig.

Samuel GRANDSIR

Age 21 (14.08.96), striker, Troyes & France
Right-sided attacker and the latest player to emerge from the Norman town of Evreux, following in the footsteps of keeper Steve Mandanda, full-back Bernard Mendy, one-time midfielder Mathieu Bodmer and wide-man Ousmane Dembele.

Andre-Frank ZAMBO ANGUISSA

Age 22 (16.11.95), midfielder, Marseille & Cameroon
It is incredible to think that just a couple of years ago the defensive midfielder was ridiculed by OM fans for his alleged lack of technical ability. Over the last season-and-a-half he has undergone a complete transformation, constantly earning praise for his use of the ball, bite in the tackle and boundless energy.

KWON Chang-hoon

Age 23 (30.06.94), midfielder, Dijon & South Korea
Technically proficient right-winger who is full of electric intent. Joined Dijon from Suwon Bluewings for €1.2m in January 2017, apparently spurning big-money offers from China and the Gulf to set up home in the Burgundian city.

Tanguy NDOMBELE

Age 21 (28.12.96), midfielder, Lyon (on loan from Amiens) & France
Central midfielder who helped Amiens achieve a first-ever promotion to the top-flight last term before joining Lyon on transfer deadline day in August and carving out a regular first-team spot. Arguably the best box-to-box player in France at the moment, he particularly impressed in both of OL's clashes with Paris Saint-Germain this term.

Jonathan BAMBA

Age 21 (26.03.96), midfielder, Saint-Etienne & France
An explosive threat playing anywhere along the front line, the academy graduate is enjoying a wonderful first season as a first-teamer with *Les Verts*. Unfortunately, player and club are not on the best of terms after recent contract renewal talks. If no new deal is struck he will be free to leave on a Bosman next summer.

6 of the best January tranfers

Nick Bidwell on the best moves in the winter window

1 Lassana DIARRA

(UNATTACHED TO PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN, FRA)

PSG's decision to recruit the out-of-contract 32-year-old defensive midfielder – who only managed a handful of starts in his last posting at Emirati club Al Jazira – left many pundits scratching their heads in bewilderment. The French club, however, see it as a win-win deal, bringing in an experienced veteran – Chelsea, Arsenal, Real Madrid and Marseille all feature on his CV, along with 34 caps for *Les Bleus* – for very little outlay to address a problem area. Until recently, the injury-prone Thiago Motta was the only recognised enforcer in the squad, and for such an ambitious club this lack of depth clearly was unsustainable. An expert ball-winner, tactically smart and a gifted dribbler and passer, "Lass" has the potential to be a real tonic for the Parc des Princes troops and a big influence on matchdays.

2 Rasmus NISSEN

(MIDTJYLLAND, DEN, TO AJAX, HOL, €5.3M)

A first-teamer with Midtjylland for almost two years, the 20-year-old right-back is the 27th Dane to have joined the Ajax ranks, following in the footsteps of such names as Soren Lerby, Frank Arnesen, Jesper Olsen, Jan Molby and Christian Eriksen, not to mention current "Ajacied" stars Kasper Dolberg and Lasse Schone. Although the Amsterdam club intend to ease the newcomer in gently, initially using him as an understudy to Joel Veltman, his long-term prospects seem very bright indeed. In an Ajax side which instinctively likes to be on the front foot he should be in his element. A Danish under-21 international, his uncle, Sigurd Kristensen, was a midfielder in the 1990s for Austrian side Sturm Graz, while his cousin Leon Jessen was a defender with Midtjylland and German club Kaiserslautern.

3 Jurgen LOCADIA

(PSV, HOL, TO BRIGHTON & HA, ENG, £14M)

Acquired for a club-record fee, the Dutch winger or centre-forward was on the scoresheet for PSV's under-23 side so often that he was dubbed "The Monday Night Messi". He got a hat-trick on his Eredivisie debut, against VVV in September 2012, and amassed a total of 62 goals in 176 competitive games for PSV over five and-a-half seasons. In recent times, such prolific Eredivisie marksman as Mateja Kezman, Jon-Dahl Tomasson, Afonso Aves, Memphis Depay and Vincent Janssen have all flopped in the English top flight, but the 24-year-old's directness and upper-body strength mean he should not find the Premier League such a culture shock. All will depend on how well he adapts to the high tempo of the play.

4 Yerry MINA

(PALMEIRAS, BRA, TO BARCELONA, SPA, €11.8M)

Named after the Tom & Jerry cartoon – although spelt with a "Y" – he is physically intimidating and excellent in recovery mode. And the 23-year-old's creative side isn't too shabby either, with his dynamic bursts into midfield and laser-guided long balls. At 6ft 5in he is now the tallest player in the Barca squad and as a youngster he aspired to be a goalkeeper – the position his father, Jose-Eulises, used to play for leading Colombian sides Deportivo Cali and Once Caldas. Every time he changes club he performs the unusual ritual of walking bare foot onto the turf at his new home stadium.

5 Fredy MONTERO

(TIANJIN TEDA, CHN, TO SPORTING, POR, UNDISCLOSED FEE)

In with a chance of a first league title in a decade-and-a-half, Sporting are convinced they have fortified their attacking options with the signing of the Colombian, who has returned to the Alvalade stadium after a two-term hiatus: at Tianjin TEDA in China and on loan to MLS side Vancouver Whitecaps. As the pressure builds, the battle-hardened 30-year-old could well turn out to be a trump card. With his poaching prowess, creativity and intelligent movement, he represents a potent all-round threat and should, if all goes according to plan, prove an ideal foil for towering Dutch striker Bas Dost. In his first spell at Sporting, from 2013 to 2016, he was very much a crowd favourite, revered for the part he played in the team's victory over Braga in the 2015 Portuguese Cup Final, as his injury-time equaliser paved the way for penalty shoot-out glory.

6 Sandro WAGNER

(HOFFENHEIM, GER, TO B MUNICH, GER, €12M)

Never one to betray the slightest hint of false modesty, the 30-year-old target man has said: "To my mind, I'm by far the best German striker around. That's been the case for quite some time. I've a way of playing which no one else has." Born and raised in Munich, he spent over a decade playing for Bayern's schoolboys, juniors and reserves, making five first-team appearances in 2007-08. After two seasons as Bayern's leader of the line, Robert Lewandowski could use the occasional rest – and the returning striker will bring an entirely different skill-set: namely aerial power, physical presence and good old-fashioned nuisance value. The all-important question is, how will he cope with the role of stand-in?

Glenn Moore

Neville rides media storm

Baptism of fire for new England boss

There has never been a more bewildering choice as manager of an England senior team, male or female. But, in one respect, Phil Neville's appointment to the women's side was a success even before he had seen a competitive female match, never mind coached one.

Part of the reasoning behind selecting the 59-times capped ex-England men's international was to raise the sport's profile. And it certainly did that.

When the former Manchester United and Everton player was formally unveiled, the national media turned out in force. He underwent a battery of TV interviews, then faced writers whose usual beat involves grilling men's manager Gareth Southgate. Only then was there an audience with the specialist women's football writers – who previously would have been the only journalists present.

Admittedly the discovery of past misogynist tweets was a factor, but it was nevertheless testament to the enduring star power of United's fabled "Class of '92" (Neville, elder brother Gary, David Beckham, Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt). The Football Association is now hoping "the winning mentality" instilled in that group by Alex Ferguson also lingers.

That appears the main justification for the FA's shock choice. While highly qualified on paper, Neville has managed just a handful of matches, for non-league Salford City, Valencia and England's under-21 men. And although the women's job specification called for "a track record of consistent and successful management", he has shown no previous interest in women's football and had been out of work for 18 months.

Baroness Sue Campbell, the architect behind Team GB's recent haul of Olympic gold medals, oversaw the selection process and revealed that the FA turned to Neville after considering 147 other candidates in 30 countries, four of whom made a shortlist before withdrawing.

"You could say any name in the women's game and I could tell you we spent quality time talking to those people," explains Campbell, who adds media coverage of the departure of Neville's predecessor, Mark Sampson, put many candidates off. Sampson was fired by the FA after it looked again at a consenting adult relationship he had with a player in his charge at Bristol Academy prior to becoming England boss. This seemed convenient given Sampson was embroiled at the time in allegations of racist behaviour towards England player Eniola Aluko.

"Having seen the way Mark's departure was dealt with by the media, many were very nervous of the scrutiny – not just for themselves but for their families," continues Campbell. "I respect that. This is not a job you can force on someone."

Determined...Fara Williams of England in November's World Cup qualifier against Kazakhstan

Two potential coaches, Vera Pauw (now at Houston Dash, and previously coach of Holland, Scotland, Russia and South Africa) and Carolina Morace (former coach of Italy and Canada, and now in charge of Trinidad & Tobago), were quick to dispute this. "I'm sorry, you can't say there aren't women available who are good enough to coach England and that they're all worried about the media scrutiny," argues Morace. "That's not true. The Baroness is wrong."

Others also felt Campbell was being disingenuous. Had the FA dealt with Aluko's complaint properly when it was first made, the position is unlikely to even have been vacant. Instead, it took three enquiries to establish Sampson had made racist comments, but was not a racist, and would, if still employed, have been sent on an education course, not sacked. The affair ended with senior FA officials, including chairman Greg Clarke and CEO Martin Glenn, being dressed down by a parliamentary committee.

In addition, most of the short-listed candidates are understood to have withdrawn not because of fear of scrutiny but because they were offered alternative jobs during the lengthy wait between the

Controversial choice...Phil Neville

first and second interviews.

Laura Harvey took up a new post at NWSL club Utah Royals, John Herdman swapped Canada's women's team for its men's, and Nick Cushing accepted an extended contract at Manchester City. The fourth, caretaker coach Mo Marley, had been a reluctant applicant in the first place, having been asked to apply by the FA. Emma Hayes, perhaps the outstanding candidate, was already committed to remaining at Chelsea.

Meanwhile Neville's name had been suggested, the grapevine has it, at a drinks party. Campbell, whose background is in netball, is acquainted with the family, not least as sister Tracey has done well as England's netball coach.

Neville underwent six hours of interviews and, says Campbell, "spoke very eloquently about his passion to help and mentor and grow women in the game – something that no one else talked to me about with the same thoughtfulness that he had".

Neville, she suggests, "is the right person for the job at this moment", adding: "I was very clear what I wanted in this job. I started to talk to people that I really trust in the game and his name came up repeatedly.

"[He is a] great leader, inspirational, technically and tactically very good, and a really emotionally intelligent guy. The players wanted someone who could lead them from third to first [in the world rankings]. Phil believes he can work with them to win the World Cup, hopefully an Olympic medal, and hopefully a European Championship in 2021."

> "You can't say there aren't women available who are good enough to coach England"
>
> Carolina Morace, coach of Trinidad & Tobago

The players, it is understood, are looking forward to working with Neville and are unworried by his sexist tweets, most of which appear to have been "banter" with family members. The wider women's game, while deeply unhappy with the process that led to Neville's appointment, and suggestions it would be a useful stepping stone for him, are prepared to back him now he is in place.

Neville faces a tough start in his new job with matches against USA, France and Germany in the SheBelieves Cup in March. That is followed by the key World Cup qualifier at home to Wales in April.

Under Sampson England reached the semi-finals in the 2015 World Cup and 2017 European Championship. Improving on that record will be difficult, but it is what is expected of Neville by fans, players, the FA – and himself. WS

Decision...Baroness Sue Campbell

Round-up

Gone...Boston Breakers (in blue)

BREAKERS BREAK-UP

Boston Breakers, a founding franchise in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), folded two months before the start of the 2018 season, reducing the US competition to nine teams.

Breakers' collapse followed the sale of Western New York Flash to North Carolina Courage in late 2016 and the closure this winter of Kansas City.

The Kansas squad immediately formed the basis of Utah Royals, but there was no re-incarnation for the Breakers, who date back to 2001. Their players were re-allocated, with US international Rose Lavelle going to Washington Spirit.

LLOYD HEADS HOME TO THE USA IN THREE-WAY TRADE

The NWSL draft was overshadowed by a blockbuster three-way trade that involved two-time FIFA world player of the year Carli Lloyd returning to Sky Blue in her native New Jersey.

Canada's Janine Beckie also went from Houston Dash to Sky Blue, Australia's Sam Kerr, who was 2017 NWSL player of the year, left Sky Blue for Chicago Red Stars, and US striker Christian Press completed the circle by swapping Chicago for Houston.

Australia's Steph Catley was also on the move, heading to Seattle Reign from Orlando Pride. Also moving to Pride is Sydney Leroux. She will join her husband, US striker Dom Dwyer, in Orlando. Both had previously been playing in Kansas.

Sisters...Ada (left) and Andrine Hegerberg

New challenge... Thomas Dennerby

NIGERIA APPOINT SWEDE

African champions Nigeria, who did not play a single game last year, appointed a new coach in Thomas Dennerby, who steered Sweden to third place at the 2011 Women's World Cup and two Olympic quarter-finals.

LEAGUE CUP DUPLICATE

Arsenal and Manchester City, who between them have won all six previous competitions, will meet in the Final of the Continental Cup, WSL's League Cup. The match-up replicates that in the men's League Cup Final.

MEXICO ON THE RISE

Mexico backed up the success of their new youth-orientated national league with a first success in the CONCACAF Under-20 finals. They beat Canada and USA on penalty shoot-outs to win the semi-final and Final respectively.

BRISBANE ROAR IN AUSTRALIA

Brisbane Roar are W-League "Premiers" after winning the regular season title. They were joined in the Championship play-offs by Sydney, Newcastle Jets and holders Melbourne City.

SISTER ACT IN FRANCE

There is an intriguing twist to the rivalry in France this season between Paris Saint-Germain and Lyon following PSG's capture of Andrine Hegerberg from Birmingham City.

The Norwegian's younger sister, Ada Hegerberg, plays for Lyon.

MARCH 1986

Real Madrid and Barcelona march on in Europe

Real Madrid were featured on the front cover following their remarkable victory over Borussia Dortmund in the UEFA Cup.

The holders made it to the quarter-finals despite losing 5-1 in the first leg of the previous round in Germany. A stunning 4-0 victory in the Bernabeu saw them progress on away goals and they would eventually go on to retain the trophy.

Meanwhile, "the dream of a Barcelona- ➤

Starting this month — World Cup Analysis . . . World Soccer's exclusive rundown on ALL 24 of the Mexico finalists. See Pages 12 to 23

Europe's clash of the Titans!

THE dream of a Barcelona-Juventus European Cup Final was shattered when the quarter-final draw for Europe's three major clubs competitions produced this star-studded pairing.

When the world's great millionaire clubs meet this month at Nou Camp's tiered vastness and in Turin, Spanish passion and Italian cunning ensure a fascinating contest.

Chief protagonists will be two exiles — Platini of France and West Germany's Bernd Schuster; rumours of the latter's impending departure for Turin give an already potentially explosive clash, added spice.

Franco-German influence will exert a huge bearing on the eventual outcome; equally decisive will be both sides' defensive ability to cope with such unique talent.

Juventus start favourites. But their burning desire to win the trophy in favourable circumstances is matched by Catalonia's passionate aspiration, to finally witness their beloved Barcelona bring home the coveted Champions' Cup. Now smoothly in their stride after a disastrous start, Archibald's return proved crucial — his goal in the Iberian clash with Porto in the last round squeezed Barcelona through by the away goals rule.

The defence remains suspect and their cavalier attitude will have to be tempered, though 120,000 Catalonians will encourage intimidatory tactics to

COVER PICTURE . . . this month are the UEFA Cup-holders and Spanish league leaders, Real Madrid. Defending the UEFA crown in typically dramatic style, Madrid recorded the sensation of the season when they pulled back to reverse a 5-1 first leg defeat by Borussia Mönchengladbach in the third round. Team line-up here: Back: Maceda, Chendo, Ochotorena, Michel, Gordillo, Camacho. Front: Butragueno, Hugo Sanchez, Valdano, Sanchis, Gallego.
Picture: PETER ROBINSON

EUROPEAN CLUB ACTION GETS UNDER WAY IN NERVE-TINGLING ACTION WITH JUVENTUS FACING BARCELONA IN THE QUARTER-FINALS OF THE CHAMPIONS' CUP.

Iain Macleod reports

force Juventus into retaliatory errors. Attacking full-back Julio Alberto will test Juventus on the flanks and defensive vigilance will assume fierce meaning for Victor and Alesanco — though much will depend on their forwards' ability to fluster a fearsome defence.

Juventus, buoyant after their World Club Championship win which spoke volumes for their character, have silenced critics who assumed the close-season departures of Boniek, Rossi and Tardelli would signal deteriorating standards. Replacements Manfredonia, Laudrup and Serena have all contributed handsomely to a brilliant season in which Juventus carved a six-point league lead.

Though fear of the big occasion has apparently been conquered, niggling doubts crept in again following the all-Italian clash with Verona in the last round: Nou Camp will be no place for doubt. But Platini goes from strength-to-strength — anything seems possible, and with last season's defensive line-up intact, continuity has ensured stability.

Terry Venables's biggest challenge to date permits no margin for error; Schuster's performance holds the key to many doors, though I suspect that should Platini utilise fully his unique match-winning talents, even Schuster will not prevent the "old lady" from a semi-final place.

The Bayern Munich-Anderlecht clash is equally intriguing. The Bavarians are chasing Bremen hard in the Bundesliga, but despite sweeping Gornik and FK Austria aside in earlier rounds, the Viennese exposed defensive inadequacies. Bayern's inexperienced youngsters remain inconsistent and with the ageing Hoeness lacking pace, coach Udo Lattek has tried a variety of permutations up front, without success. Augenthaler provides some defensive stability, Lerby the midfield inspiration.

Potentially, Europe's most exciting side, Anderlecht, compound often scintillating performances with the inconsistency which got coach Paul van Himst sacked before Christmas. Entrusted to restore former glories, former Parc Astrid favourite Arie Haan, inherits a side centred round Morton Olsen. In midfield, Vercauteren and Vandereycken's experience complement Scifo's marvellous talent and Vandenbergh provides the forward power.

Haan could have had an easier baptism, but I expect the mauve and whites to qualify — despite indifferent domestic form.

IFK Goteborg will provide Aberdeen with a worthy opponent. Though Orgryte denied IFK another Swedish title, the "angels" — being gradually rebuilt — remain committed to attacking football and dispatched Trakia and Fenerbahce impressively enough. The return of former goalscoring hero Torbjorn Nilsson, has offset the loss of brilliant youngster Mats Gren.

Aberdeen remain inconsistent. The aquisition of Jim Bett has led to no significant im-

● Continued overleaf

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● Continued from previous page

The key men . . . Michel Platini in action against Fiorentina in the Italian League.

EUROPEAN CUPS HIGH-SCORING RECORDS

AGGREGATE RECORDS

Jeunesse Hautcharage-Chelsea 0-8 0-13 = 0-21 (C2, 71/72)
Feyenoord-US Rumelange 9-0 12-0 = 21-0 (C3, 72/73)
Levski Spartak-Reipas Lahti 12-0 7-1 = 19-1 (C2, 76/77)
Stade Dudelange-Benfica 0-8 0-10 = 0-18 C1, 65/66)
Valetta-Glasgow Rangers 0-8 0-10 = 0-18 (C2, 83/84)
Sporting Lisbon-Apoel Nicosia 16-1 2-0 = 18-1 (C2, 63/64)
Swansea-Sliema 12-0 5-0 = 17-0 (C2, 82/83)
Feyenoord-Olympiakos Nicosia 8-0 9-0 = 17-0 (C1, 71/72)
US Luxembourg-1.FC Köln 0-4 0-13 = 0-17 (C3, 65/66)
Avenir Beggen-IFK Gotenborg 0-8 0-9 = 0-17 (C1, 84/85)
Leeds-Lyn Oslo 10-0 6-0 = 16-0 (C1, 69/70)
Sparta Praha-Anorthosis Famagusta 10-0 6-0 = 16-0 (C2, 64/65)
Spora Luxembourg-Leeds 0-9 0-7 = 0-16 (C3, 67/68)
Rabat Ajax-Internacional Bratislava 0-10, 0-6 = 0-16 (C3, 83/84)
IB Vestmannaeyjar-Borussia Mönchengladbach 0-7 1-9 = 1-16 (C2, 73/74)
Derby-Finn Harps 12-0 4-1 = 16-1 (C3, 76/77)
AZ '67 Alkmaar-Red Boys Differdange 11-1 5-0 = 16-1 (C3, 77/78)
Reipas Lahti-Spartak Trnava 1-9 1-7 = 2-16 (C1, 68/69)
Feyenoord-KR Reykjavik 12-2 4-0 = 16-2 (C1, 69/70)
HJK Helsinki-Ajax Amsterdam 1-8 1-8 = 2-16 (C1, 79/80)
Honved-Reipas Lahti 10-2 6-0 = 16-2 (C2, 65/66)

European draws

EUROPEAN CUP

EUROPEAN CUP-WINNERS' CUP

UEFA CUP

Juventus European Cup Final was shattered" when the pair were paired in the last eight. Nevertheless, "Spanish passion and Italian cunning ensure a fascinating contest," wrote Iain Macleod.

He continued: "Juventus start favourites. But their burning desire to win the trophy in favourable circumstances is matched by Catalonia's passionate aspirations to finally witness their beloved Barcelona bring home the coveted Champions Cup."

Macleod pointed out that the "chief protagonists will be two exiles: [Michel] Platini of France and West Germany's Bernd Schuster". He noted that "Franco-German influence will exert a huge bearing on the eventual outcome; equally decisive will be both sides' defensive ability to cope with such unique talent".

Of Juventus, Macleod wrote: "Though fear of the big occasion has apparently been conquered, niggling doubts crept in again following the all-Italian clash with Verona in the last round. Nou Camp will be no place for doubt.

> **"Spanish passion and Italian cunning ensure a fascinating contest"**

"But Platini goes from strength to strength. Anything seems possible – and with last season's defensive line-up intact, continuity has ensured stability."

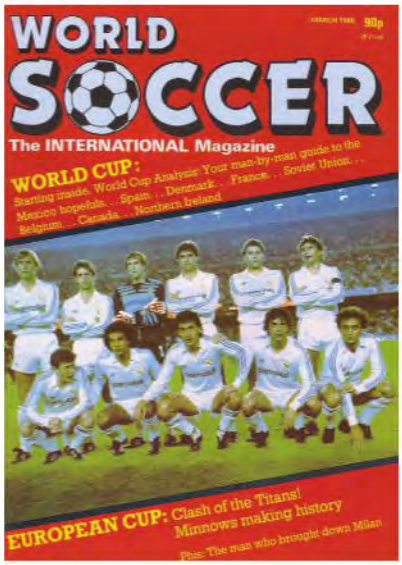
As for Barca and their coach, Macleod commented: "Terry Venables' biggest challenge to date permits no margin for error. Schuster's performance holds the key...though I suspect that should Platini utilise fully his unique match-winning talent, even Schuster will not prevent the 'old lady' from a semi-final place."

Macleod did, however, offer the Spanish side a glimmer of hope, suggesting "attacking full-back Julio Alberto will test Juventus on the flanks" while "120,000 Catalans will encourage intimidatory tactics to force Juventus into retaliatory errors".

And his observations were to prove uncannily accurate.

In front of a full Camp Nou, Julio Alberto scored the only goal of the opening leg. Two weeks later in the return, Platini did indeed make his mark with a goal just before half-time, but an earlier strike from Scottish striker Steve Archibald saw Barca win 2-1 on aggregate.

After scraping past Gothenburg in the semi-finals, an expected first-ever European Cup was denied to Barcelona by Steaua Bucharest and they would have to wait another six years to claim European football's ultimate prize. WS



Also in this issue...

p28 Despite failing to win the World Cup four years earlier, Tele Santana had been reinstated as Brazil coach ahead of the 1986 finals in Mexico. "Santana's appointment came as something of a surprise," wrote Eric Weil, who noted that his 1982 team "was applauded for the nice soccer it played".

p34 After the previous year's Bulgarian Cup Final, "CSKA Sofia and Levski Spartak were disbanded" while "two players were banned for life", reported Terry Bushell. "Now, one of the life-ban stars, national team goalkeeper Borislav Mikhailov, has been amnestied," he added, explaining that the keeper had rejoined the squad ahead of the World Cup finals.

p36 After losing 9-0 to Monaco, Andre Duclos revealed how Bordeaux keeper Dominique Dropsy "admitted that he couldn't sleep a wink after the rout". Aime Jacques, the Bordeaux manager, said he couldn't have imagined his team collapsing psychologically as they did.

p38-39 Formed by Italian migrants in 1948, Brunswick Juventus were crowned Australian national champions. Before the season began they had been promised a game against their more famous namesakes if they won the title.

10 years ago Derby County draw 2-2 with Fulham on March 29 and are relegated – the earliest such guaranteed demotion in the history of the Premier League.

20 years ago Mexico striker Hugo Sanchez plays for just one minute in a 1-1 draw with Paraguay in his farewell game, staged at the Estadio Azteca, which is attended by 100,000 fans.

30 years ago Cameroon beat Nigeria 1-0 at Stade Mohamed V in Casablanca, Morocco with a penalty from Emmanuel Kunde to win the African Nations Cup for a second time.

40 years ago Nottingham Forest win the League Cup, beating Liverpool 1-0 in a replay at Old Trafford after a goalless draw in the first game at Wembley.

50 years ago Leeds United win their first piece of silverware under Don Revie as they beat Arsenal 1-0 in the League Cup Final with a goal from Terry Cooper.

MISCELLANEOUS

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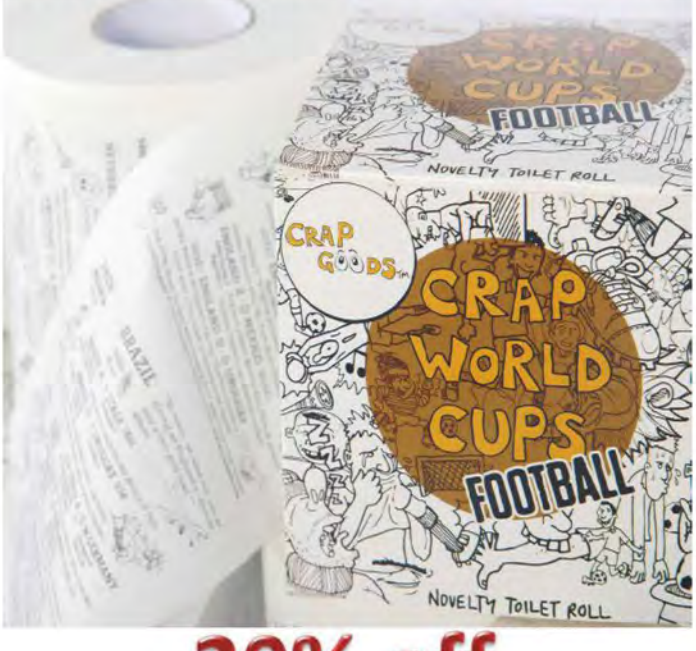

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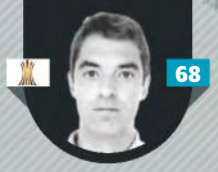


68

JOHN DUERDEN — Asian Champions

71

MIKE PLASTOW — Japan

72

PLUS

72

Clash...Cerezo Osaka's Kenyu Sugimoto (left) and Tatsuki Nara of Kawasaki Frontale

DIARY

70 Comprehensive global news

RESULTS, TABLES, FIXTURES

78 ESM XI
79 Club football
79 Internationals

SQUADS

80 England: Premier League

71

New start... Al Gharafa's Wesley Sneijder (left)

USA

PAUL GARDNER

MLS discovers entertainment

Atlanta show the way forward with an influx of young South America talent

MLS enters its 23rd season with all the positives that seem to come every year: more teams, new stadiums, growing fan support, increased television and so on.

Missing from that list, however, is the calibre of the game as played on the pitch. Is it getting better?

The answer is, tentatively, yes – but only within a self-imposed straightjacket.

Almost from the beginning, MLS has lived with the idea of being a physical league. But the attractions of a such an approach are beginning to wear thin, with too many stodgy games and not enough goalscoring.

If the 2016 and 2017 MLS Cup Finals – both of them, as it happens, featuring Toronto and Seattle Sounders – can be said to display MLS football at its best, then there is simply not enough to get excited about.

It is arguable that in the USA, where the game's promoters are trying to popularise not just new teams but a comparatively new sport, entertaining matches are more important than anywhere else. Yet little attention has been paid, either by the league itself or by the clubs, to the idea of entertainment. Physical football, with its largely destructive approach, is not likely to allow the sport's intricate skills to flourish or to encourage goalscoring.

The clubs have been coached, almost exclusively, by Europeans or Euro-influenced Americans. European styles, European tactics and, of course, European players have been the norm.

Latinos, whether players or coaches, have not featured prominently. There has been a slow willingness to recruit South Americans, but those that have arrived – usually mid-career players from Argentina and invariably typical number 10 creative midfielders – have been highly successful.

Javier Morales led Real Salt Lake to the MLS championship in 2009, while Diego Valeri did the same for Portland Timbers in 2015. Other influential

Star attraction... Miguel Almiron of Atlanta United

KEY DATES

Season starts March 3
Season ends October 28
MLS Cup Final December 8

Preview

Influential...Portland Timbers' Diego Valeri

Expansion...Carlos Vela arrives at Los Angeles

Argentinians have included Federico Higuain and Guillermo Barros Schelotto, both with Columbus Crew.

But while there has been no drastic shift as yet, 2018 may well go down as the year MLS opted for entertainment. More South Americans are coming, and they are younger. Much younger.

By mid-February, MLS clubs had signed 20 new South Americans, with their average age being 20 years and five months. And that change can be traced directly to one man: Argentinian coach Gerardo Martino, who was hired by the newly created Atlanta United last year.

Martino brought with him extensive knowledge of the South American scene and a network of contacts – something that has never been a strong point among the MLS Euro-oriented coaches.

Into Atlanta came players from Argentina, Venezuela and, particularly, Paraguay. From day one of last season, Atlanta lit up the league with their fast, intricate play and their goalscoring.

> "The path from Latin America to Europe increasingly passes through the US"
> NYCFC's 20-year-old Paraguayan Jesus Medina

They drew enormous crowds, averaging 48,200 for their 17 home games, winning 11 of them and drawing three, with their highly skilful play a crowd-pleasing change from the now over-familiar physical play.

Atlanta were the team to watch and their star attraction, the dynamic 23-year-old Paraguayan midfielder Miguel Almiron soon became the league's most popular player.

So far, 15 of the 23 MLS clubs have signed young Latinos. Thirteen of the players are outright transfers, while seven are loan deals. Argentina and Venezuela supply six apiece, followed by Paraguay (three), Uruguay (two), with one each from Peru, Ecuador and Chile. Somewhat oddly, there are no Brazilians, and while no Colombians appear on the list so far, that may change if Minnesota United are successful in their quest for Nicolas Benedetti.

Replacement... Jesus Medina

The six Venezuelans include the youngest signing, 18-year-old Cristian Casseres, who joined New York Red Bulls. Across town, New York City FC have signed 20-year-old Paraguayan Jesus Medina as a likely replacement for the young English forward Jack Harrison, who has been whisked away by NYC's parent club, Manchester City.

The prize catch has gone to Atlanta, who paid an MLS record of $15million for 18-year old Argentinian midfielder Ezequiel Barco of Independiente, who was a regular starter last season and a member of their Sudamericana Cup-winning side. European clubs were already circling, but Martino was able to impress the teenager with the opportunities offered by Atlanta.

The new young Latinos will be joining three Mexican veterans: the Dos Santos brothers, Giovani and Jonathan, at LA Galaxy, and Carlos Vela, who was one of the first signings for the expansion Los Angeles FC.

Of course, signing talented youngsters is not without its down side. Can MLS clubs hang on to these players when rich European clubs show interest? New York City know about this with Harrison, and as his replacement Medina has said: "The path from Latin America to Europe increasingly passes through the US."

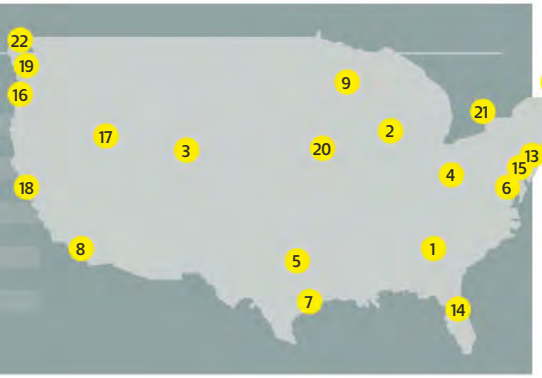
The problem for MLS is to convince young players that there is a future – and good money – in the league, and that it should not be seen as merely a stepping stone to Europe.

It is to be hoped that the arrival of young Latinos from South America will help the development of young USA-born Latino players. The difficulties faced by such players has been highlighted by the case of Jonathan Gonzalez, a California-born midfielder who had to go to Mexico to be appreciated. At 18 he is holding down a starting position for Monterrey and his decision to play for Mexico and not the US – he holds dual citizenship – exposes severe gaps in the scouting systems of both the US Federation and MLS.

The next chance for MLS to show its preference for a more entertaining Latin-style game will be a challenge to, of all people, David Beckham. His franchise has now been accepted by MLS to form a team that will play, from 2020, in Miami, which has been dubbed "The Capital of Latin America". WS

UNITED STATES
MLS: 2018

1 Atlanta United
2 Chicago Fire
3 Colorado Rapids
4 Columbus Crew
5 Dallas
6 DC United
7 Houston Dynamo
8 LA Galaxy Los Angeles
9 Minnesota United
10 Montreal Impact
11 New England Revolution
12 New York City
13 New York Red Bulls
14 Orlando City
15 Philadelphia Union
16 Portland Timbers
17 Real Salt Lake
18 San Jose Earthquakes
19 Seattle Sounders
20 Sporting Kansas City
21 Toronto
22 Vancouver Whitecaps



MLS 2018: INS & OUTS

ATLANTA UNITED

COACH: Gerardo Martino (Arg)
IN: Ezequiel Barco (Independiente, Arg), Franco Escobar (Newell's Old Boys, Arg), Mitch Hildebrandt (Cincinnati), Jose Hernandez (Caracas, Ven), Darlington Nagbe (Portland Timbers), Sal Zizzo (New York Red Bulls)
OUT: Bobby Boswell (retired), Carlos Carmona (Colo-Colo, Chl)

CHICAGO FIRE

COACH: Veljko Paunovic (Ser)
IN: Aleksandar Katai (Alaves, Spa), Rafael Ramos (Orlando City)
OUT: David Accam (Philadelphia Union), Arturo Alvarez (Houston Dynamos), David Arshakyan (Vejle, Den), Jorge Bava (Liverpool, Uru), Matt Lampson (Minnesota United), Joao Meira (Lorca, Spa)

COLORADO RAPIDS

COACH: Anthony Hudson (Eng)
IN: Johan Blomberg (AIK, Swe), Edgar Castillo (Monterrey, Mex), Kip Colvey (San Jose Earthquakes), Andrew Dykstra (Sporting Kansas City), Jack McBean (LA Galaxy), Jack Price (Wolverhampton Wanderers, Eng), Tommy Smith (Ipswich Town, Eng), Danny Wilson (Rangers, Sco), Deklan Wynne (Vancouver Whitecaps)
OUT: Mo Saeid (Lyngby, Den)

COLUMBUS CREW

COACH: Gregg Berhalter
IN: Artur (Sao Paulo, Bra), Ricardo Clark (Houston Dynamo), Mike Grella (Colorado Rapids), Jon Kempin (LA Galaxy), Edward Opoku (Virginia University), Eduardo Sosa (Zamora, Ven), Milton Valenzuela (Newell's Old Boys, Arg), Gyasi Zardes (LA Galaxy)
OUT: Waylon Francis (Seattle Sounders), Ola Kamara (LA Galaxy), Kekuta Manneh (Pachuca, Mex), Justin Meram (Orlando City), Jukka Raitala (Los Angeles), Brad Stuver (New York City)

DALLAS

COACH: Oscar Pareja (Col)
IN: Francis Atuahene (Michigan University), Jimmy Maurer (New York Cosmos), Anton Nedyalkov (CSKA Sofia, Bul), Kris Reaves (Portland Pilots), Brandon Servania (Wake Forest University), Ema Twumasi (Wake Forest University), Reto Ziegler (Luzern, Swi)
OUT: Atiba Harris (Murcielagos, Mex), Chris Seitz (Houston Dynamo), Walker Zimmerman (Los Angeles)

DC UNITED

COACH: Ben Olsen
IN: Frederic Brillant (New York City), Oniel Fisher (Seattle Sounders), Darren Mattocks (Portland Timbers), Junior Moreno (Zulia, Ven), David Ousted (Vancouver Whitecaps), Ulises Segura (Saprissa, CR), Gonzalo Veron (New York Red Bulls)
OUT: Bill Hamid (Midtjylland, Den), Gonzalo Veron (Independiente, Arg), Eryk Williamson (Portland Timbers)

HOUSTON DYNAMO

COACH: Wilmer Cabrera (Col)
IN: Arturo Alvarez (Chicago Fire), Eric Bird (Rio Grande Valley FC Toros), Juan David Cabezas (Deportivo Cali, Col), Darwin Ceren (San Jose Earthquakes), Alberth Elis (Monterrey, Mex), Alejandro Fuenmayor (Carabobo, Ven), Chris Seitz (Dallas)
OUT: Alex (Suwon, SKo), Jalil Anibaba (New England Revolution), Ricardo Clark (Columbus Crew), Taylor Hunter (Colorado Springs Switchbacks), Christian Lucatero (Club Necaxa, Mex), Erick Torres (Pumas, Mex)

LA GALAXY

COACH: Sigi Schmid (Ger)
IN: David Bingham (San Jose Earthquakes), Servando Carrasco (Orlando City), Rolf Feltscher (Cardiff City, Eng), Ola Kamara (Columbus Crew), Perry Kitchen (Randers, Den), Chris Pontius (Philadelphia Union), Jorgen Skjelvik (Rosenborg, Nor)
OUT: Clement Diop (Montreal Impact), Jon Kempin (Columbus Crew), Jack McBean (Colorado Rapids), Brian Rowe (Vancouver Whitecaps), Jaime Villarreal (Sacramento Republic), Jose Villarreal (Orlando City), Gyasi Zardes (Columbus Crew)

LOS ANGELES

COACH: Bob Bradley
IN: Steven Beitashour (Toronto), Latif Blessing (Sporting Kansas City), Laurent Ciman (Montreal Impact), Benny Feilhaber (Sporting Kansas City), Jordan Harvey (Vancouver Whitecaps), Dejan Jakovic (New York Cosmos), Mark-Anthony Kaye (Lousiville City), Aaron Kovar (Seattle Sounders), Luis Lopez (Real Espana, Hnd), Calum Mallace (Seattle Sounders), Tyler Miller (Seattle Sounders), Diego Rossi (Penarol, Uru), Marco Urena (San Jose Earthquakes), Walker Zimmerman (Dallas)
OUT: -

MINNESOTA UNITED

COACH: Adrian Heath (Eng)
IN: Harrison Heath (Atlanta United), Matt Lampson (Chicago Fire), Tyrone Mears (Atlanta United), Frantz Pangop (Union Douala, Cam), Mason Toye (Indiana University)
OUT: Justin Davis (Nashville), Joseph Greenspan (Pittsburgh Riverhounds), Johan Venegas (Saprissa, CR), Kevin Venegas (Indy Eleven)

Making an impression...Ola Kamara joined LA Galaxy from Columbus Crew

Venezuelan...Atlanta's Jose Hernandez

MONTREAL IMPACT (Can)

COACH: Remi Garde (Fra)
IN: Jason Beaulieu (New Mexico Lobos), Zakaria Diallo (Brest, Fra), Clement Diop (LA Galaxy), Raheem Edwards (Los Angeles), Thomas Meilleur-Giguere (Ottawa Fury, Can), James Pantemis (FC Montreal, Can), Michael Petrasso (Queens Park Rangers, Eng), Jukka Raitala (Los Angeles), Saphir Taider (Bologna, Ita)
OUT: Laurent Ciman (Los Angeles), Maxime Crepeau (Ottawa Fury, Can), Ambroise Oyongo (Montpellier, Fra), Andres Romero (San Martin, Arg), Ballou Tabla (Barcelona B, Spa)

NEW ENGLAND REVOLUTION

COACH: Brad Friedel
IN: Jalil Anibaba (Houston Dynamo), Cristian Penilla (Pachuca, Mex), Nicolas Samayoa (Florida Gulf Coast Eagles), Gabriel Somi (Ostersund, Swe), Wilfried Zahibo (Gimnastic, Spa)
OUT: Kei Kamara (Vancouver Whitecaps), Donnie Smith (Charlotte Independence), London Woodberry (Nashville)

NEW YORK CITY

COACH: Patrick Vieira (Fra)
IN: Jo Inge Berget (Malmo, Swe), Cedric Hountondji (GFC Ajaccio, Fra), Jesus Medina (Libertad, Par), Saad Abdul-Salaam (Sporting Kansas City), Brad Stuver (Columbus Crew), Ismael Tajouri (Austria Vienna, Aut), Anton Tinnerholm (Malmo, Swe)
OUT: RJ Allen (Orlando City), Frederic Brillant (DC United), Mix Diskerud (Manchester City, Eng), Jack Harrison (Manchester City, Eng), Eirik Johansen (Sandefjord, Nor), Mikey Lopez (San Antonio), Khiry Shelton (Sporting Kansas City), Andraz Struna (Anorthosis Famagusta, Cyp)

NEW YORK RED BULLS

COACH: Jesse Marsch
IN: Cristian Casseres Jr (Deportivo La Guaira, Ven), Amando Moreno (Tijuana, Mex), Michael Amir Murillo (San Francisco, Pan), Tommy Redding (Orlando City), Carlos Rivas (Orlando City), Marc Rzatkowski (Red Bull Salzburg, Aut)
OUT: Brandon Allen (Bethlehem Steel), Mike Grella (Colorado Rapids), Sacha Kljestan (Orlando City), Gonzalo Veron (DC United), Sal Zizzo (Atlanta United)

ORLANDO CITY

COACH: Jason Kreis
IN: RJ Allen (New York City), Josue Colman (Cerro Porteno, Par), Mohamed El Monir (Partizan, Ser), Adam Grinwis (Saint Louis), Sacha Kljestan (New York Red Bulls), Justin Meram (Columbus Crew), Stefano Pinho (Miami), Oriol Rosell (Sporting, Por), Amro Tarek (Wadi Degla, Egy), Jose Villarreal (LA Galaxy)
OUT: Giles Barnes (Club Leon, Mex), Hadji Barry (Swope Park Rangers), Servando Carrasco (LA Galaxy), Conor Donovan (Rio Grande Valley), Cyle Larin (Besiktas, Tur), Rafael Ramos (Chicago Fire), Tommy Redding (New York Red Bulls), Carlos Rivas (New York Red Bulls)

PHILADELPHIA UNION

COACH: Jim Curtin
IN: David Accam Chicago Fire), Cory Burke (Bethehem Steel), Mark McKenzie (Wake Forest University)
OUT: Roland Alberg (CSKA Sofia, Bul), Chris Pontius (LA Galaxy), Giliano Wijnaldum (Willem II, Hol)

PORTLAND TIMBERS

COACH: Giovanni Savarese (Ven)
IN: Samuel Armenteros (Benevento, Ita), Julio Cascante (Saprissa, CR), Andres Flores (New York Cosmos), Modou Jadama (Tulsa Roughnecks), Foster Langsdorf (Stanford University), Cristhian Paredes (Club America, Mex), Andy Polo (Morelia, Mex), Eryk Williamson (DC United)
OUT: Gbenga Arokoyo (Atlanta United), Darren Mattocks (DC United), Darlington Nagbe (Atlanta United)

REAL SALT LAKE

COACH: Mike Petke
IN: Corey Baird (Stanford University, Shawn Barry (Korona Kielce, Pol), Adam Henley (Blackburn Rovers, Eng), Aaron Herrera (New Mexico Lobos), Damir Kreilach (Union Berlin, Ger), Brooks Lennon (Liverpool, Eng), Alfredo Ortuno (Real Valladolid, Spa), Taylor Peay (Real Monarchs), Pablo Ruiz (San Luis de Quillota, Chl), Jefferson Savarino (Zulia, Ven)
OUT: Omar Holness (Bethlehem Steel), Justin Schmidt (Sacramento Republic), Matt Van Oekel (Oklahoma City Energy)

SAN JOSE EARTHQUAKES

COACH: Mikael Stahre (Swe)
IN: Eric Calvillo (New York Cosmos), Magnus Eriksson (Djurgarden, Swe), Luis Felipe (Reno 1868), Danny Hoesen (Groningen, Hol), JT Marcinkowski (Georgetown Hoyas), Jimmy Ockford (Reno 1868), Yeferson Quintana (Penarol, Uru), Joel Qwiberg (Brommapojkarna, Swe), Chris Wehan (Reno 1868)
OUT: David Bingham (LA Galaxy), Darwin Ceren (Houston Dynamo), Kip Colvey (Colorado Rapids), Andres Imperiale (Club Guarani, Par), Matheus Silva (Swope Park Rangers), Marco Urena (Los Angeles)

SEATTLE SOUNDERS

COACH: Brian Schmetzer
IN: Handwalla Bwana (Washington University), Magnus Wolff Eikrem (Malmo, Swe), Waylon Francis (Columbus Crew)
OUT: Oniel Fisher (DC United), Joevin Jones (Darmstadt, Ger), Aaron Kovar (Los Angeles), Calum Mallace (Los Angeles), Tyler Miller (Los Angeles)

SPORTING KANSAS CITY

COACH: Peter Vermes
IN: Emiliano Amor (Velez Sarsfield, Arg), Yohan Croizet (Mechelen, Blg), Felipe Gutierrez (Real Betis, Spa), Kenwyne Jones (Atlanta United), Matt Lewis (Fordham University), Johnny Russell (Derby County, Eng), Khiry Shelton (New York City), Alexandros Tabakis (Atlanta United)
OUT: Saad Abdul-Salaam (New York City), Latif Blessing (Los Angeles), Andrew Dykstra (Colorado Rapids), Benny Feilhaber (Los Angeles), Kevin Oliveira (Atlanta United), Tyler Pasher (Atlanta United)

TORONTO (Can)

COACH: Greg Vanney
IN: Auro (Sao Paulo, Bra), Gregory Van der Wiel (Cagliari, Ita)
OUT: Oyvind Alseth (Ranheim, Nor), Brandon Aubrey (Bethlehem Steel), Steven Beitashour (Los Angeles), Armando Cooper (Universidad de Chile, Chl), Raheem Edwards (Los Angeles)

VANCOUVER WHITECAPS (Can)

COACH: Carl Robinson (Wal)
IN: Anthony Blondell (Monagas, Ven), Doneil Henry (West Ham United, Eng), Efrain Juarez (Monterrey, Mex), Kei Kamara (New England Revolution), Brian Rowe (LA Galaxy),
OUT: Sam Adekugbe (Valerenga, Nor), Christian Bolanos (Saprissa, CR), Marco Bustos (Atletico Zacatepec, Mex), Nosa Igiebor (Anorthosis Famagusta, Cyp), Matias Laba (Estudiantes, Arg), Spencer Richey (Cincinnati), Jordan Harvey (Los Angeles), David Ousted (DC United), Cole Seiler (Sacramento Republic), Deklan Wynne (Colorado Rapids)

New recruit...New York City's Brad Stuver

Libertadores Cup

TIM VICKERY

Big guns compete for more cash

Brazilian clubs are the ones to beat in continental showpiece

Despite Mexican clubs again being absent due to an inability to reconcile their domestic league with the new year-long structure, the prize money for this year's Libertadores Cup has been doubled.

And given the financial advantages its clubs enjoy over their continental rivals, Brazil is the logical place to start when looking for sides capable of claiming those added riches.

No one has managed to retain the Libertadores title since Boca at the start of the century, but this year **Gremio** will certainly fancy their chances. Last year's winning coach Renato Portaluppi is still at the club – as is Luan, the support striker named as South America's outstanding player of 2017, and little midfielder Arthur, who is firmly on the radar of Barcelona. But while the European summer window is a threat, their biggest challenge may come from some of Gremio's compatriots.

With wealthy sponsors and revenue pouring in from their impressive new stadium, **Palmeiras** would appear to be in pole position. They have assembled a squad which has considerable depth and plenty of quality, especially since the acquisition of international playmaker Lucas Lima from Santos.

Their big problem last term was piecing together a coherent team from so many signings, but new coach Roger Machado – who had much to do with the start of the rise of the current Gremio team – has been brought in to find a solution.

Palmeiras' historic Sao Paulo rivals **Corinthians** are a mirror image. Their new stadium is proving something of a burden and the club's finances are not healthy, but they do have a well consolidated idea of play, put into practice effectively in last year's domestic league win by coach Fabio Carille. Much will depend on how he copes without centre-forward Jo, who was Brazil's player of the year in that title-winning campaign before leaving for Nagoya Grampus in Japan.

Santos will surely suffer from the loss of Lucas Lima and ex-international centre-forward Ricardo Oliveira, who has joined Atletico Mineiro, although Gabriel "Gabigol" Barbosa has returned on loan from a very disappointing time in Europe with Internazionale. Coach Jair Ventura, who was so impressive at Botafogo, faces his biggest test yet.

There have been numerous recent Libertadores disappointments for Rio's **Flamengo** and they look some way behind their Sao Paulo rivals after a destabilising start to the year, with coach Reinaldo Rueda resigning to take charge of Chile. Paulo Cesar Carpeggiani was hurriedly brought in as a replacement but if they can get out of the group phase, their mass support will make them tough opponents.

Cruzeiro will also be interesting to watch. Former national boss Mano

Back...Carlos Tevez (second left) has rejoined Boca Juniors

Still there... Luan of Gremio

KEY DATES

Group games start
February 27
Group games end
May 24
Round of 16
August 7-9
& 28-30
Quarter-finals
September 18-20
& October 2-4
Semi-finals
October 23-25
& 30-November 1
FINAL
November 7 & 28

Preview

Dark horses...Bolivian rivals Oriente Petrolero (in green) and Jorge Wilstermann met in the qualifying rounds

Menezes tends not to favour a target man up front, so it will be fascinating to see how he incorporates new signing Fred, the 2014 World Cup centre-forward, in the side.

Last year Cruzeiro let go of their Argentinian striker Ramon Abila and he now lines up at **Boca Juniors**, who have brought back Carlos Tevez from Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua. Much of this move was bankrolled by a new TV deal that should aid a strong showing from the Argentinian clubs this term.

Boca return after a year's absence and coach Guillermo Barros Schelotto has an impressive squad, with the depth to shrug off some recent injury problems. Knitting an ageing Tevez back into the team may not be an easy task, but there is pace around him with Cristian Pavon and plenty of midfield options.

Semi-finalists last year, **River Plate** are more of a work-in-progress and have some big-name new signings to assimilate in international centre-forward Lucas Pratto, goalkeeper Franco Armani and, intriguingly, Colombian playmaker Juan Fernando Quintero, a player of immense talent whose career has taken him down a blind alley. If coach Marcelo Gallardo can help him rediscover his hunger and his touch, River will be very easy on the eye.

Sudamericana Cup winners last December, **Independiente** have a fascinating coach in Ariel Holan, with his background in field hockey and an open-minded approach. Their neighbours **Racing** are now coached by Eduardo Coudet, who did such impressive work at Rosario Central. Both Holan and Coudet's squads lack the quality and depth of Boca and River, but it will be interesting to see if they can gain momentum during the campaign, with much the same applying to Lucas Bernardi's **Estudiantes**.

Early exit...debutants Macara of Ecuador went out in the qualifying rounds

Only twice in the last 17 years has the title eluded the Brazil-Argentina axis, with the last time being in 2016, when the champions were **Atletico Nacional** of Colombia. Their new Argentinian coach Jorge Almiron, who took Lanus to last year's Final, comes highly rated and does not represent a radical departure from his predecessors. But while another title looks a long shot, Nacional will be well worth keeping an eye on during this campaign – especially because of their group opponents.

One of those is **Bolivar**. Clubs from Bolivia have enjoyed surprising success recently, with Bolivar reaching the semi-finals in 2014 and doing just as well away from home as they did at altitude. They showed good domestic form in 2017 and it will be intriguing to see what new Brazilian coach Vinicius Eutropio does with the side.

Also in the group are **Colo-Colo**. Chilean clubs have an appalling recent record in the Libertadores and in the last three years – and four of the last five – not a single Chilean has made it out of the group phase. Maybe Pablo Guede's team are capable of doing better. With Jorge Valdivia and Jaime Valdes they have plenty of midfield quality and experience, and Esteban Paredes is a proven goalscorer, but can the youngsters compete at this level?

Last year the team that ran the Brazilians and Argentinians closest was Barcelona of Ecuador, but they have not qualified this year – a consequence of taking their eye off domestic form and making the Libertadores their priority. However, their Guayaquil rivals **Emelec** are back. Last year they made the knockout stage before going out on penalties and Uruguayan coach Alfredo Arias has stayed on, winning the domestic title with a side that break forward with pace and power.

However, being drawn in a tough group that includes River Plate and Flamengo leaves little margin for error. WS

Knitting an ageing Carlos Tevez back into the Boca Juniors team won't be an easy task

JANUARY 18-FEBRUARY 14, 2018

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Thursday January 18

FRANCE: Jocelyn Gourvennec is sacked as coach of Bordeaux after seven defeats in eight games, while midfielder Jeremy Toulalan has his contract cancelled.
SENEGAL: A five-year ban imposed on US Ouakam – following crowd violence at the 2017 League Cup Final left at least eight people dead – is lifted by CAS, who rule that the club should not be held solely responsible for July's tragedy.

Friday January 19

GERMANY: Schalke midfielder Leon Goretzka passes a medical and will join Bayern Munich at the end of the season.
HOLLAND: Robin Van Persie returns to Feyenoord, 14 years after leaving the club, on a free transfer from Turkish side Fenerbahce.
USA: Atlanta United sign Argentina under-20 striker Ezequiel Barco from Independiente for an MLS-record fee of $15million.

Saturday January 20

ENGLAND: Sergio Aguero scores the 11th hat-trick of his Manchester City career as they beat Newcastle United 3-1.
FRANCE: Uruguayan coach Gus Poyet takes charge of Bordeaux.
WALES: The New Saints beat Cardiff Met 1-0 to win the Welsh League Cup.

Sunday January 21

ENGLAND: Watford sack Marco Silva and appoint Javi Gracia as their new manager.
FRANCE: Memphis Depay scores a late winner as Lyon beat Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 to move within eight points of the Ligue 1 leaders.
GERMANY: Hamburg sack Markus Gisdol after Saturday's 2-0 loss to rock-bottom Cologne.
HOLLAND: Ajax beat Feyenoord 2-0 for a third successive victory in *De Klassieker*.
SCOTLAND: Don Cowie scores an 87th-minute winner as Hearts beat Edinburgh rivals Hibernian 1-0 in the Scottish Cup.
SPAIN: Real Madrid win in La Liga for the first time since December 9, thrashing Deportivo La Coruna 7-1.

Monday January 22

GERMANY: Ex-Hamburg midfielder Bernd Hollerbach returns to the club as coach.
TURKEY: Sivasspor agree terms with former Brazil striker Robinho, who was released by Atletico Mineiro in December.

Tuesday January 23

ENGLAND: Former international Phil Neville is named manager of England's women's team.
PHILIPPINES: AFC Champions League debutants Ceres-Negros shock two-time A-League winners Brisbane Roar in Australia, coming from a goal down to win 3-2 and reach the third preliminary round.

Wednesday January 24

ENGLAND: Arsenal beat Chelsea 2-1 and will face Manchester City in the League Cup Final.
GERMANY: Darmstadt's game at home to Kaiserslautern in the second tier is abandoned when the visitors' coach Jeff Strasser is taken ill at half-time.
SPAIN: Leganes beat Real Madrid 2-1 at the Bernabeu after losing their home leg and go through on away goals in the Spanish Cup.

Thursday January 25

AUSTRALIA: Dutch coach Bert Van Marwijk, who took Holland to the Final in 2010, will lead Australia at this summer's World Cup.
GERMANY: RB Leipzig sign 16-year-old midfielder Mads Bidstrup from Copenhagen for €2.5m – even though he is yet to play a senior game for the Danish club.
SPAIN: Philippe Coutinho makes his Barcelona debut as a sub in a 2-0 win at home to city rivals Espanyol in the Spanish Cup.

Friday January 26

ENGLAND: Alexis Sanchez sets up two goals on his Manchester United debut as they beat Yeovil Town 4-0 in the FA Cup.

Saturday January 27

FRANCE: Edinson Cavani scores in Paris Saint-Germain's 4-0 victory over Montpellier to beat Zlatan Ibrahimovic's club record of 156

Shock...Leganes' Brazilian midfielder Gabriel (second right) celebrates his winning goal against Real Madrid in the Spanish Cup

Out...Brisbane Roar (in orange) lose to Ceres-Negros

goals in all competitions.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich stage a comeback from two goals down to beat Hoffenheim 5-2.
PORTUGAL: Sporting beat Vitoria Setubal on penalties after a 1-1 draw to win the Portuguese League Cup for the first time.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo becomes only the second player, after Pele, to score more than 100 penalties as he puts away two spot-kicks in Real Madrid's 4-1 win away at Valencia.

Sunday January 28

BOLIVIA: Bolivar begin the new Primera Division campaign with a 5-1 victory over Jorge Wilstermann.
MEXICO: Veracruz score in Liga MX for the first time in eight hours and 26 minutes, but Santos Laguna grab a late equaliser to draw 1-1.

Monday January 29

ENGLAND: Ex Premier League ref Paul Alcock dies at the age of 64.
GERMANY: Tayfun Korkut takes ➤

Joy...Veracruz keeper Pedro Gallese

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Preview

Champions League gets underway

Saudis and UAE back down ahead of kick-off

With Saudi Arabia and the UAE severing diplomatic, financial and travel ties with Qatar in June, the 2018 Asian Champions League was making headlines before it had even begun.

With Qatari teams in each of the four West Asian groups – the 32 teams are split into two geographic regions until the Final – fixtures against Saudi and Emirati opposition was assured, and a request for neutral venues for such fixtures – which would have been contrary to competition rules and the spirit of the game – was rejected by the AFC in late January.

With the politics out of the way, attention can at last turn to the football – and in particular the Chinese challenge.

Strong...Shanghai SIPG (in red) beat Thailand's Chiangrai United in the qualifiers

KEY DATES
Group games started February 12
Group games end April 18
Round of 16 May 7-9 & 14-16
Quarter-finals August 27-29 & September 17-19
Semi-finals October 1-3 & 22-24
Final November 3 & 10

Three of the four Chinese Super League teams involved have real ambitions of lifting the trophy in November.

The only one to do so, in 2013 and 2015, is **Guangzhou Evergrande**, and despite saying goodbye to coach Luiz Felipe Scolari at the end of last season – after a seventh successive league title – they have the experience and talent to go all the way. Fabio Cannavaro is the new man in charge, returning to the club that sacked him three years ago after just six months in the job. Winning a third Asian title would be a perfect way to stamp his authority on a team that includes Ricardo Goulart and plenty of Chinese internationals.

Cannavaro left **Tianjin Quanjian** to take the post and was replaced in the port city by Paulo Sousa, who has stars such as Axel Witsel, Alex Pato and Anthony Modeste at his disposal, and the firepower to do well in a first continental campaign. The same can also be said of last year's semi-finalists **Shanghai SIPG**, who still have Hulk in their ranks, but Chinese Cup winners **Shanghai Shenhua** will surely struggle without Carlos Tevez.

South Korea remains the most successful nation in terms of club titles but its sides performed poorly last time out. **Jeonbuk Motors**, who weren't allowed to defend their 2016 title after a club scout was found guilty of bribing referees during the 2013 K-League campaign, are the country's best bet to lift a 12th continental championship.

The trophy currently resides with Urawa Reds, but they haven't qualified, so Japanese hopes rest with **Kawasaki Frontale**, who won their first J.League title in 2017, and **Kashima Antlers**, who are still seeking a first continental trophy.

Australian sides tend to struggle as their champions are crowned in May and they then have to wait almost a year to compete in Asia. However, **Sydney** have dominated domestically again this term and Asia will be a good test for Graham Arnold, who has been tipped to be the next coach of the national team after the recently appointed Bert Van Marwijk.

Only one West Asian team has broken eastern dominance since 2005: **Al Sadd** of Qatar. With Xavi in their ranks they have a chance again, as do fellow Doha club **Al Gharafa** with Wesley Sneijder.

Saudi Arabia's **Al Hilal** have lost two of the last four Finals and have been busy in the transfer market. Runners-up in 2016, **Al Ain** of the United Arab Emirates are also keen to add to their 2003 win, although star playmaker Omar Abdulrahman has been in uncertain form of late.

Iranian clubs have yet to win the Champions League, but with Uzbekistan lifting the AFC Under-23 title in January this could be a good year for Central Asian football. WS

Japan

MIKE PLASTOW

Preview

Grampus make the headlines

Brazilian striker Jo is the big pre-season signing

Back in the top flight a year after they were relegated, **Nagoya Grampus** stole the pre-season headlines with their €11million signing of former Manchester City striker Jo from Brazilian champions Corinthians, where he was Serie A's joint-top scorer and player of the year last term.

The arrival of the 31-year-old, who has been capped 20 times by his country, is intended to announce a sea change for a club whose fortunes have dipped sharply in recent years.

His signing harks back to the early days of the J.League when Grampus led the way in importing big-name players and managers such as Gary Lineker, Dragan Stojkovic and Arsene Wenger to kick-start interest in the nascent competition.

> "I will work hard to win the title for everyone who is cheering us on"
>
> Nagoya Grampus' new striker Jo

Stojkovic would later return as coach and lead the club to the championship in 2010, but since then Grampus have flattered to deceive, and the question now is whether a side that struggled to gain promotion from the J2 League will fare any better this time out. Jo, however, is talking about winning the league, stating: "I will work hard to win the title for everyone who is cheering us on."

Having led Grampus back to the top flight in his first season, Yahiro Kazama will hope to give the team's long-suffering supporters some instant reward after their year in the wilderness. And precedents for newly promoted teams doing well in their first season back have piled up in recent years, with Cerezo Osaka's impressive third-place finish last term and Kashiwa Reysol's back-to-back J2 and J1 titles in 2010 and 2011. Grampus' prospects of a successful campaign should also be reinforced by the arrival Australia goalkeeper Mitch Langerak from La Liga side Levante.

Defending champions **Kawasaki Frontale** were the league's top scorers last season, with 71 goals, but that hasn't stopped them from making serious reinforcements in attack. The most striking new arrival is Yokohama F.Marinos captain Manabu Saito, a winger with an outside chance of making Japan's World Cup squad this summer. Sidelined with a ligament injury since September, he probably won't be ready for the start of the J1 League but will be eager to make his mark in time for Russia.

Statement...Jo won the Brazilian title last year with Corinthians

World Cup veteran Yoshito Okubo, the J.League's top scorer with Kawasaki for three years in a row from 2013-15, also returns after a year away at FC Tokyo. It was partly Okubo's absence that allowed Yu Kobayashi, the league's top scorer and player of the year in 2017, to shine so brightly in Kawasaki's championship season, and Okubo may have to settle for being his sidekick.

Heading into the final stages of last season's championship, **Kashima Antlers** looked to have their title defence sewn up before an uncharacteristic slip. Nevertheless, the quality of the squad remains unquestioned and Go Oiwa, who took over as coach midway through last year, will be expected to mount a challenge after his appointment was extended.

Antlers welcome back defender Atsuto Uchida from Union Berlin after seven-and-a-half years in Germany, although his recent injury problems continue. Meanwhile, young hopefuls Gen Shoji, Naomichi Ueda, Kento Misao and Shoma Doi are all firmly in the spotlight for World Cup selection, while not-so-young wing-back Shuto Yamamoto is also knocking heavily on

New signings...(from left) Kashima's Tomoya Inukai, Kazuma Yamaguchi, Atsuto Uchida, Koki Anzai and Yuya Oki

the national-team door.

Cerezo Osaka made a spectacular return to the top flight last season after two years in the second tier, winning a League Cup and Emperor's Cup double, and finishing third in the league to qualify for the AFC Champions League. Striker Kenyu Sugimoto established his place in the Japan squad alongside team captain Hotaru Yamaguchi, but it remains to be seen if Yoon Jong-hwan's squad is strong enough to cope with this year's added demands.

Kashiwa Reysol, who are also in the Champions League, have made quiet progress under Takahiro Shimotaira and their strong youth element was reflected in the J.League's Best Young Player award to central defender Yuta Nakayama.

Urawa Reds, winners of the 2017 AFC Champions League, can't defend their title after finishing only seventh in the league but that could be a blessing in disguise if it eases their fixture list and now allows them to concentrate on the league. They have a good squad and will be more fired up than ever after last year's roller-coaster ride.

Rafael Silva, the scorer of the Reds' decisive goals in both the semi-final and Final of the Champions League, has left

J1 LEAGUE: 2018

1 Cerezo Osaka
Gamba Osaka
Vissel Kobe
2 Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo
3 Jubilo Iwata
Shimizu S-Pulse
4 Kashima Antlers
Kashiwa Reysol
Kawasaki Frontale
Shonan Bellmare
Tokyo
Urawa Red Diamonds
Yokohama F.Marinos
5 Nagoya Grampus
6 Sagan Tosu
7 Sanfrecce Hiroshima
8 V-Varen Nagasaki
9 Vegalta Sendai

KEY DATES
League starts February 23, 2018
League ends December 1, 2018

for Chinese club Wuhan Zall but Curacaoan winger Quenten Martinus is a quality signing from Yokohama F.Marinos and may do more than plug that gap.

Reds former boss Mihailo Petrovic, who left midway through last season, has now taken over at **Hokkaido Consadole Sapporo**, while Kenta Hasegawa is the new man in charge at **FC Tokyo** after a disappointing campaign last time. Hasegawa's big new signing is Brazilian striker Diego Oliveira, who is on loan from Kashiwa Reysol, but the player to watch could be 16-year old Takefusa Kubo, who made four first-team appearances last year.

Another player of interest will be 32-year-old former Germany striker Lucas Podolski, who had a disappointing start at **Vissel Kobe** but is still at the club and will hopefully settle in more effectively this term.

While Brazilians continue to dominate the foreign-players slots with 30 confirmed by the start of February, there are five Thais registered so far, including Teerasil Dangda, who has scored 42 goals in 91 games for his country and joins **Sanfrecce Hiroshima** on loan from Muangthong United. WS

Quality...Quenten Martinus (right) has left Yokohama F.Marinos for Urawa Reds

➤ over from Hannes Wolf as coach of Stuttgart after Saturday's 2-0 home defeat to Schalke.

USA: David Beckham and his consortium are granted a licence for an MLS franchise in Miami.

Tuesday January 30

ENGLAND: Manchester City sign French defender Aymeric Laporte from Athletic Bilbao for a club record fee of £57m.

FRANCE: Kylian Mbappe is sent off as Paris Saint-Germain beat Rennes 3-2 to reach the French League Cup Final.

NORTHERN IRELAND: Dungannon Swifts beat Crusaders 2-1 in extra-time to reach the League Cup Final for the first time.

TURKEY: Deniz Naki, a 28-year-old midfielder who plays for third-tier Amed, is banned for life by the Turkish Football Federation for his support of Kurdish separatists.

Wednesday January 31

ENGLAND: Gabon striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is the most expensive signing on transfer-deadline day, joining Arsenal for a club-record fee of £56m from Borussia Dortmund.

PARAGUAY: Leonel Alvarez, coach of reigning Clausura champions Cerro Porteno, resigns two days before the Apertura gets under way.

Thursday February 1

FRANCE: Referee Tony Chapron receives a six-month ban – half of which is suspended – for kicking and then sending off Nantes' Diego Carlos in the game against Paris Saint-Germain in January.

SCOTLAND: Scottish FA chief executive Stewart Regan, who had been criticised for his handling of the search for Gordon Strachan's successor as national coach, steps down from his position.

Friday February 2

CHILE: Three Colo-Colo academy players are killed in a bus crash in Argentina while travelling to a youth tournament in Paraguay.

ENGLAND: West Ham United sack director of player recruitment Tony Henry after he said the club would not sign any more African players because they "cause mayhem" when they are not in the team.

Saturday February 3

GERMANY: Seven Freiburg players are booked in their goalless draw at home to Bayer Leverkusen.

SPAIN: Sergio Ramos becomes the first defender to score in 14 ➤

➤ consecutive La Liga seasons as Real Madrid draw 2-2 at Levante.

Sunday February 4

ENGLAND: Championship side Leeds United begin looking for their seventh manager since 2014 after sacking Thomas Christiansen.
FRANCE: Lyon surrender a two-goal lead and lose 3-2 at Monaco, who have Balde Keita sent off.
ITALY: Gonzalo Higuain gets his first hat-trick for Juventus as they thrash Sassuolo 7-0.
MOROCCO: A 4-0 victory over 10-man Nigeria sees Morocco become the first hosts to win the African Nations Championship.
SPAIN: Gerard Pique scores a late equaliser as Barcelona draw 1-1 at Espanyol to set a new club record of 22 games unbeaten at the start of a Liga campaign. Deportivo La Coruna sack coach Cristobal Parralo after Friday's 5-0 loss at Real Sociedad.

Monday February 5

ITALY: National under-21 coach Luigi Di Biagio will take charge of the senior team for friendlies against Argentina and England in March.
SPAIN: Former Real Madrid and Holland midfielder Clarence Seedorf is named coach of Deportivo La Coruna until the end of the season.
WALES: Top-flight club Carmarthen Town terminate manager Mark Aizlewood's contract after he is found guilty of fraudulently obtaining £5million of public funds for a fake football-apprenticeship scheme.

Tuesday February 6

ENGLAND: Swansea City beat Notts County 8-1 for a club-record win in the FA Cup and Carlos Carvalhal's side will now face Sheffield Wednesday – the side he parted company with on Christmas Eve.
FRANCE: Full-back Dani Alves goes in goal for the last few seconds of Paris Saint-Germain's 4-1 win at Sochaux in the French Cup after Kevin Trapp is sent off. Marseille record their biggest victory in 70 years as they hammer Bourg-en-Bresse 9-0 in the same competition.
HOLLAND: Ronald Koeman signs a four-and-half year contract to coach the national side.

Wednesday February 7

COLOMBIA: Finalizacion champions Millonarios win the Superliga play-off for the first time, triumphing 2-1 away at Apertura holders Atletico Nacional after a goalless first leg.
RUSSIA: A competition-record crowd of 32,510 watch Real Madrid beat Krasnodar on penalties at ➤

Republic of Ireland

SEAN CREEDON

Cork plot title defence

Caulfield targets more success

Cork City boss John Caulfield spent the close season trying to find a replacement for Sean Maguire, who scored 20 times last term before joining Preston North End in July. Cork made a 22-game unbeaten start to the season and went 15 points clear of Dundalk at the top of the table, but without their top scorer Caulfield's side struggled before eventually stumbling over the finishing line to claim a first league title for 12 years.

Caulfield, however, doesn't agree with the term "stumbled" and says: "We also lost Kevin O'Connor to Preston North End at the same time as Maguire, and our captain John Dunleavy was injured. Losing three of your first-team squad is a serious blow.

"We did have a blip and the chasing clubs improved, but we still won the league by seven points with two series of games to be played, and then beat Dundalk to retain the FAI Cup.

"It's always difficult to find goalscorers, but we have brought Graham Cummins back to the club from St Johnstone. He is a local lad who scored the goal that secured promotion to the Premier Division back in 2011. He scored 44 goals in 66 games for the club, but we were in the First Division then. Naturally it will be tougher in the Premier.

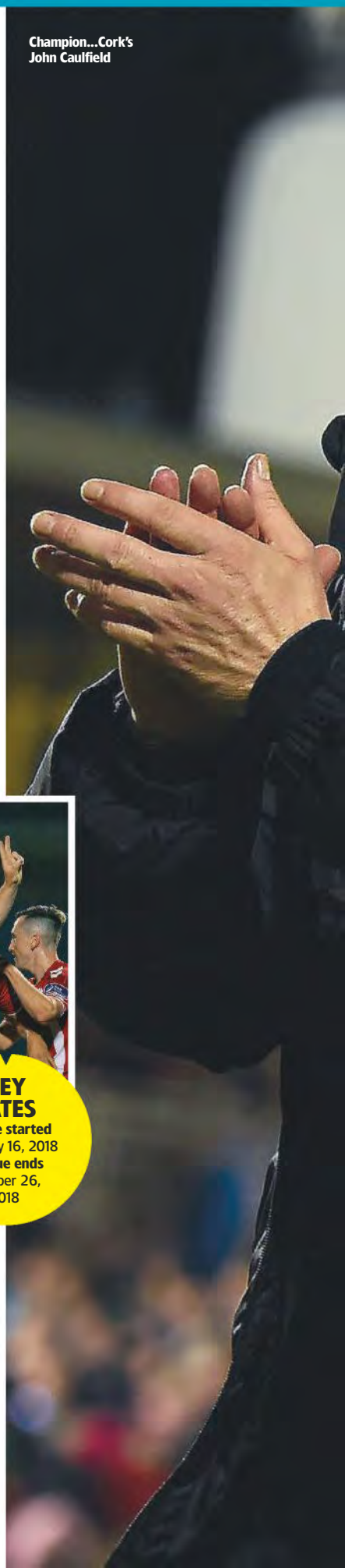
"We also got Josh O'Hanlon from St Patrick's Athletic, Irish under-21 international Danny Kane from Huddersfield, Barry McNamee and Aaron Barry from Derry City, and Tobi Adebayo-Rowling from Sligo Rovers.

"It's no secret that there has been a high turnover of League of Ireland clubs in Cork down through the years.

"Cork Hibernians and Cork Celtic won league titles and the FAI Cup Final, but they 'folded' due to poor administration. Now we want to ensure that Cork City is put on a sound financial

Challengers...Caulfield believes that Derry City could do well

KEY DATES
League started February 16, 2018
League ends October 26, 2018



Champion...Cork's John Caulfield

Preview

Pressure...Dundalk keeper Gary Rogers tries to keep out Cork in the FAI Cup Final

standing. When I took over as manager at the end of 2013 we had only six players. Now we have built up the club on and off the pitch. We have played in three FAI Cup Finals in a row, winning two, played in Europe and won our first championship in 12 years last season.

"All of our players are on 52-week contracts. During the economic recession in Ireland many clubs were forced into 40-week contracts. But I think it's only right players are on 52-week contracts if they are trying to secure a loan or a mortgage. And City recently appointed Paul Wycherley as general manager. He had previously worked with QPR and Millwall.

"For the past four seasons it has been a two-horse race between Dundalk and ourselves. This season I expect to see a challenge from Shamrock Rovers, Derry City and possibly Sligo Rovers.

"Shamrock has retained nearly all their squad from last season and manager Stephen Bradley has added former Irish international Joey O'Brien, who was released by West Ham. Derry are back home at a revamped Brandywell after a season playing across the border in Buncrana."

> "When I took over as manager at the end of 2013 we only had six players"
> Cork boss John Caulfield

Dundalk have been bought by an American investment company, Peak6, who already have a 25 per cent share in Bournemouth. But while the club lost striker David McMillan to St Johnstone and Patrick McEleney to Oldham Athletic, manager Stephen Kenny has brought Patrick Hoban back to the club and also signed former Hungarian under-21 international Krisztian Adorjan on loan from Italian club Livorno.

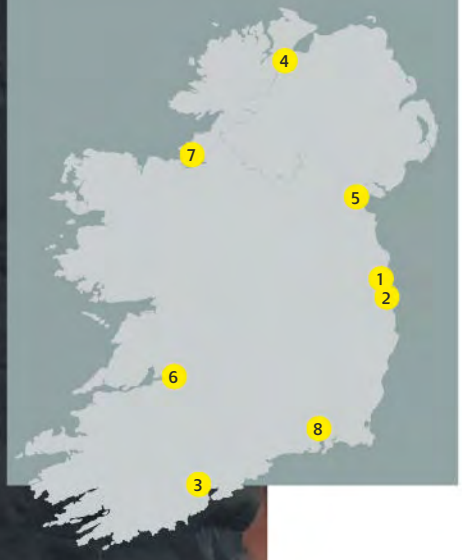
Adorjan was once on the books of Liverpool, as was Adam Morgan, who is one of the many newcomers at Sligo Rovers. Sligo have also signed the much travelled Brazilian-born Eduardo Pincelli from Cypriot club Ethnikos Achna.

Caulfield is more than happy to see new players coming into the league and says: "It can only help to raise the standard. The league also provides an opportunity for young Irish players to re-establish themselves.

"You look at players such as Keith Fahey and Seanie Maguire, who joined English clubs when they were very young, didn't manage to settle, came home to play in the League of Ireland, and then moved back to England when they were more mature." WS

LEAGUE OF IRELAND PREMIER DIVISION: 2018

1 Bohemians
Shamrock Rovers
St Patrick's Athletic
2 Bray Wanderers
3 Cork City
4 Derry City
5 Dundalk
6 Limerick
7 Sligo Rovers
8 Waterford



➤ Stadium Krasnodar in the UEFA Youth League play-off.

Thursday February 8

HOLLAND: Thirteen years and 358 days after he scored his last goal for Feyenoord, Robin Van Persie is on target for the first time since his return in a 3-0 win over Groningen.
SPAIN: Philippe Coutinho scores his first goal for Barcelona as they beat Valencia 2-0 and now face Sevilla in the Spanish Cup Final.

Friday February 9

NORTHERN IRELAND: Michael O'Neill agrees a four-year contract extension to carry on as Northern Ireland manager.

Saturday February 10

EGYPT: Football returns to the Port Said Stadium for the first time since 72 people died in the 2012 disaster, as a restricted crowd of 10,000 watches Al Masry beat Green Buffaloes of Zambia 4-0 in the African Confederation Cup.
ENGLAND: Manchester City's Sergio Aguero makes it 13 in 10 games this year with four second-half goals in his side's 5-1 win over Leicester City.
FRANCE: Mario Balotelli is booked for complaining to the referee about racist chants as Nice lose 3-2 away to Dijon. Paris Saint-Germain beat Toulouse 1-0 to move 12 points ahead of Monaco, who win 4-0 at Anger.
GERMANY: Robert Lewandowski equals a Bundesliga record by scoring in his 11th consecutive home game at the start of a season as Bayern Munich beat Schalke 2-1 to go 18 points clear at the top.
ITALY: Napoli return to the top of Serie A with a 4-1 victory over Lazio despite conceding the opening goal.
USA: Carlos Cordeiro is elected US Soccer president and will replace Sunil Gulati.

Sunday February 11

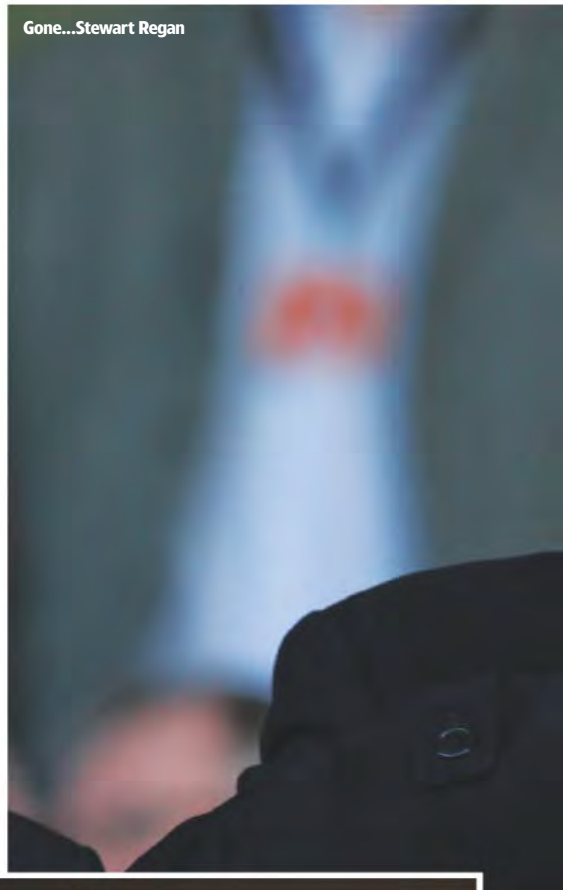
ENGLAND: After seven visits, Jose Mourinho is still yet to win a league game at St James' Park as his Manchester United side lose 1-0 to Newcastle United.
ITALY: Internazionale avoid a club-record run of eight league games without a win by beating Bologna 2-1.
MOROCCO: Difaa El Jadida thrash Benfica of Guinea-Bissau 10-0 to record the biggest-ever single-leg victory in African Champions League history.
PORTUGAL: Still unbeaten in ➤

Scotland

PHIL GORDON

Regan has to pay the price

O'Neill debacle costs SFA chief executive his job



Gone...Stewart Regan

If England's cricketers thought they had a wretched winter in Australia, one of their compatriots was suffering just as badly in Scotland. Glasgow is not the obvious place to feel the heat in January, but Stewart Regan did as he wilted under fierce public and media scrutiny for his failure to find a new Scotland manager, and lost his own job as Scottish FA chief executive.

Regan came to the SFA from Yorkshire Cricket in 2010, but if England lost the Ashes before Christmas, Regan fumbled just as badly when it came to the perfect catch of securing Michael O'Neill as Gordon Strachan's successor.

Strachan's contract was not renewed in October after he failed to qualify for the World Cup finals. The former Celtic manager was harshly ousted by Regan after five years, and the only plan from the SFA was to lure O'Neill once Northern Ireland also failed to qualify for Russia 2018.

Target...Scotland missed out on Michael O'Neill

O'Neill has lived in Edinburgh for years. He played for Hibernian and Dundee United, and began his managerial career at Brechin City. His acceptance of the Scotland job was painted in the media as a done deal.

However, after talks with Regan, O'Neill turned down the SFA and was given a new four-year-deal by the Irish FA – and his new salary was even bigger with his current employers than what the SFA offered.

That was the final nail in Regan's tenure. O'Neill has since hinted of Regan's error in making him the only candidate to succeed Strachan. "The discussions were very amicable and gave me a lot to think about," said O'Neill. "But they went for a manager who was contracted to another association and it's very difficult to leave your own country."

> "In my time in the game, this is as bad as it has been"
>
> Celtic chief executive Peter Lawwell on the SFA

Regan's failure to have any alternatives meant that other potential recruits, such as Paul Lambert and David Moyes, were ignored and have now taken jobs at Stoke City and West Ham United respectively.

The SFA's performance director, Malky Mackay, is in temporary charge for the friendlies with Costa Rica and Hungary in March, just as he was in November for the game against Holland.

Scotland under-21 coach Scot Gemmill has a lot of admirers for a promotion from within, while Steve Clarke gets the public vote after his good work with Kilmarnock. Former Scotland boss Walter Smith was backed by a press campaign, but he is now 70 and announced his retirement from management in 2011.

The managerial vacuum could last until the summer, when Scotland play friendlies in Peru and Mexico: a tour organised by Regan that will only raise £250,000 but upset Celtic – who provide most of Scotland's

players – who were not consulted about a trip just two weeks before the Champions League qualifiers.

There is no timescale for a new chief executive but it will probably be done before the new Scotland manager is appointed.

However, Celtic chief executive Peter Lawwell says the SFA's next chief exec needs to build bridges with clubs. "We need someone who will bring Scottish football together," argues Lawwell. "In my time in the game, this is as bad as it has been. It has to be a priority to build those bridges again."

Lawwell is the most important voice in Scottish football, having overseen Celtic's record £90million turnover last season, with the club announcing a six-month turnover of £72m up to December, which means the 2017-18 sum will eclipse £100m.

But not all of Celtic's ideas for growth are met with enthusiasm, with the champions and Rangers wanting their reserve teams to play in the fourth tier of the SPFL.

Celtic's head of youth Chris McCart and his Ibrox counterpart, Craig Mulholland, visited fourth-tier clubs to make presentations. The Glasgow rivals believe that the concept of B teams in lower leagues helps the development of young players, as in Spain and Holland.

The idea is nothing new. As far back as 1967, Jock Stein wanted to do the same after Celtic won the European Cup, with a reserve team that had teenage talent like Kenny Dalglish.

Celtic and Rangers have tried to sweeten the pot, by offering to play all their games away from home and putting in £15,000 to each of the 10 fourth-tier clubs. But the idea was rebuked by one man from that league, who has a foot in both camps.

Peterhead manager Jim McInally began his career with Celtic and played for Dundee United in the 1987 UEFA Cup Final, and he says: "There is no benefit to lower-league clubs. I don't see why we should try and do Celtic and Rangers' work for them. I'm a Celtic supporter but we have our own players to develop. It demeans the league."

Start... Andrew Robertson with Queens Park (in hoops)

McInally's point is backed up by the rise of Andrew Robertson. The Scotland defender began at modest Queen's Park before Dundee United, Hull City and his £8m transfer to Liverpool.

And with Michael O'Neill starting the coaching ladder at Brechin, the Scottish lower leagues have a good case. WS

➤ the league, Porto win 4-0 at Chaves and return to the top of the league.

SPAIN: Barcelona remain top of the table but fail to score for the first time in La Liga this season as Getafe draw 0-0 at Camp Nou. Valencia come from behind to beat Levante 3-1 and move above Real Madrid into third place.

Monday February 12

GREECE: Olympiakos are docked three points and ordered to play two games behind closed doors after violence broke out at the end of this month's 2-1 derby defeat at home to AEK.

QATAR: Wesley Sneijder scores on his Asian Champions League debut but Al Gharafa lose 3-2 to UAE champions Al Jazira.

Tuesday February 13

AUSTRALIA: Melbourne Victory come from behind three times to draw 3-3 with South Korea's Ulsan in the AFC Champions League.

ENGLAND: In the Champions League, Tottenham Hotspur come from two goals down in the first 10 minutes to draw 2-2 at Juventus while Manchester City beat Basle 4-0 in Switzerland.

UKRAINE: The country's public broadcaster says it will not show any World Cup games from Russia this summer due to tense relations between the two nations.

URUGUAY: Nacional supporters are banned for three games after some fans taunted Chapecoense during a Libertadores Cup game in January about the plane crash which killed 19 of their players and staff.

Wednesday February 14

AUSTRALIA: Sydney lose a competitive game at home for the first time since April 2016, going down 2-0 to Suwon Bluewings in the AFC Champions League.

BRAZIL: Gremio draw 1-1 in the Recopa Sudamericana away leg against Independiente of Argentina.

HOLLAND: Second-tier side Fortuna Sittard suspend former Nigeria coach Sunday Oliseh for "unacceptable actions".

PORTUGAL: Going into the game on a 24-match unbeaten run, Porto lose 5-0 to Liverpool in the Champions League and suffer their heaviest European home defeat.

SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo scores twice in the last seven minutes as Real Madrid beat Paris Saint-Germain to become the first player to score 100 Champions League goals for one club. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

JANUARY 2018

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11
SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

* Alisson (Roma) also received four votes, but De Gea has had more votes during the season

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	23
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	16
EDERSON (Manchester City)	7
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	5
ALISSON (Roma)	4
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	2
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	2
Alphonse AREOLA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
NETO (Valencia)	1
Rui PATRICIO (Sporting)	1
Wojicech SZCZESNY (Juventus)	1
Sven ULREICH (Bayern Munich)	1

DEFENDERS

Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	20
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	16
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	15
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	15
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	14
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	11
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	9
Dani ALVES (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	7
John STONES (Manchester City)	7
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	6
Faouzi GHOULAM (Napoli)	6
Samuel UMTITI (Barcelona)	6
Jerome BOATENG (Bayern Munich)	5
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	5
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Mehdi BENATIA (Juventus)	4
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	4
Layvin KURZAWA (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	4
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	4
Antonio VALENCIA (Manchester United)	4
Hector BELLERIN (Arsenal)	3
Andreas CHRISTENSEN (Chelsea)	3
Jose GAYA (Valencia)	3
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	3
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	3
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
NALDO (Schalke)	3
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	3
Alex TELLES (Porto)	3
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	2
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Marc BARTRA (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Andreas GRANQVIST (Krasnodar)	2
MARCELO (Lyon)	2
Philipp MAX (Augsburg)	2
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Manuel AKANJI (Basle)	1
Raul ALBIOL (Napoli)	1
Antonin BARAK (Udinese)	1
Ben DAVIES (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Stefan DE VRIJ (Lazio)	1
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
Sead KOLASINAC (Arsenal)	1
Andrea MASIELLO (Atalanta)	1
Jeremy MATHIEU (Sporting)	1
Nacho MONREAL (Arsenal)	1
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Andrew ROBERTSON (Liverpool)	1
Antonio RUDIGER (Chelsea)	1
Alex SANDRO (Juventus)	1
Salif SANE (Hanover)	1
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Jonathan TAH (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1
Thomas VERMAELEN (Barcelona)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	50
Leon BAILEY (Bayer Leverkusen)	8
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	8
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	7
David SILVA (Manchester City)	7
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	6
Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	5
Goncalo GUEDES (Valencia)	5
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	4
ISCO (Real Madrid)	4
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	3
JORGINHO (Napoli)	3
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	3
Nemanja MATIC (Manchester United)	3
Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	3
Adrien RABIOT (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Nuri SAHIN (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Andres INIESTA (Barcelona)	2
Geoffrey KONDOGBIA (Valencia)	2
Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC (Lazio)	2
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	2
Dani PAREJO (Valencia)	2
PAULINHO (Barcelona)	2
Paul POGBA (Manchester United)	2
SON Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Florian THAUVIN (Marseille)	2
Corentin TOLISSO (Bayern Munich)	2
Emre CAN (Liverpool)	1
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	1
DANILO (Porto)	1
Marouane FELLAINI (Manchester United)	1
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	1
Alejandro GOMEZ (Atalanta)	1
Ibai GOMEZ (Alaves)	1
Luiz GUSTAVO (Marseille)	1
Naby KEITA (RB Leipzig)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Yunus MALLI (Wolfsburg)	1
Blaise MATUIDI (Juventus)	1
Andreas PEREIRA (Valencia)	1
Ivan PERISIC (Internazionale)	1
Maximilian PHILIPP (Borussia Dortmund)	1
PORTU (Girona)	1
Christian PULISIC (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	1
James RODRIGUEZ (Bayern Munich)	1
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	1
TALISCA (Besiktas)	1
Arturo VIDAL (Bayern Munich)	1
Ruud VORMER (Club Brugge)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	42
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	25
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	23
Mohamed SALAH (Liverpool)	21
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	18
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	9
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	9
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	9
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	8
Romelu LUKAKU (Manchester United)	8
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	6
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	6
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	5
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	4
Nabil FEKIR (Lyon)	3
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	3
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	2
Roberto FIRMINO (Liverpool)	2
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	2
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Cedric BAKUMBU (Villarreal)	1
Memphis DEPAY (Lyon)	1
Bas DOST (Sportling)	1
Gabriel JESUS (Manchester City)	1
JONAS (Benfica)	1
Sadio MANE (Liverpool)	1

Internationals

FRIENDLIES

Monday, January 15
Jan15 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Jordan 3 (Abdelhadi 25, Al Dardour 57, Al Mardi 83)
Denmark 2 (Gammelby 48, Duelund 85)
HT: 1-0
Jordan: Abu Laila - Shilbayeh, Khattab, Bani Yaseen, Al Dmeiri, Ayed (Al Mardi 76), Al Samarneh, Haddad (Thalji 79), Abdelhadi (Abu Hudeib 90), Al Rawashdeh (Lahham 90), Al Dardour (Murjan 84).
Denmark: J Hansen - Gammelby, Nelsson (K Hansen 87), Rasmussen, Nissen (Pedersen 69), Mathias Jensen (Duelund 46), Skytte (Uhre 79), J Poulsen, Kadrii (Skov 58), Pohl, Laursen.

Saturday, January 27
Jan 27 - Antalya, Turkey
Moldova 0
South Korea 1 (Kim Shin-wook 68)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 200. **Ref:** Ulusoy (Tur)
Moldova: Cebanu (Calancea 46) - Jardan, Posmac, Rogac (Racu 46), Rozgoniuc, Cojocari (Taras 77), Dedov, Paireli (Spataru 61), Platica (Ivanov 61), Damascan (Ambros 77), A Pascenco.
South Korea: Cho Hyun-woo - Hong Chul, Kim Young-gwon (Jang Hyun-soo 46), Kim Min-jae, Kim Tae-hwan, Lee Seung-gi (Kim Shin-wook 46), Kim Sung-joon (Son Jun-ho 65), Lee Chan-dong, Go Yo-han (Lee Jae-sung 46), Jin Seong-wook (Lee Keun-ho 72), Kim Seung-dae (Lee Chang-min 72).

Sunday, January 28
Jan 28 - Carson
United States 0
Bosnia-Herzegovina 0
Att: 11,161. **Ref:** Martinez (Hnd)
United States: Hamid (Steffen 46) - Polster, Zimmerman, Opara, Morrow, Adams, Zardes (Arriola 46), Trapp (Rubin 83), Roldan (Agudelo 69), Morris, Sapong (Rowe 46).
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Sehic - D Todorovic, Graovac, Mihojevic, Bekic, Tomic (Cavar 46), Medunjanin (Besirevic 72), Saric (Bilbija 80), Zakaric (O Todorovic 68), Ahmetovic (Koljic 46), Menalo (E Ibisevic 83).

Tuesday, January 30
Jan 30 - Antalya, Turkey
Moldova 0
Azerbaijan 0
Att: 300. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)
Moldova: Cebanu - Jardan, Posmac, Cojocari, Dedov (Platica 84), Ambros (Damascan 55), Racu, A Pascenco (Taras 77), Antoniuc (Spataru 64), Mihaliov (Paireli 68; Ivanov 90+2), Rozgoniuc.
Azerbaijan: K Agayev - A Huseynov, Medvedev, Abisov, Pashayev (Khalilzade 61), Amirguliyev (Imamverdiyev 61), Garayev, Ismayilov (Gurbanov 23; Hajiyev 85), J Huseynov, Almeida (Diniyev 85), Madatov (Sheydayev 77).

Jan 30 - Antalya, Turkey
South Korea 2 (Kim Shin-wook 55, 63)
Jamaica 2 (Kelly 5, Foster 72)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 100. **Ref:** Ulusoy (Tur)
South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Kim Jin-su, Jang Hyun-soo, Yun Young-sun (Jung Seung-hyun 82), Choi Chul-soon, Lee Chang-min (Kim Seung-dae 46), Son Jun-ho (Kim Sung-joon 46), Jung Woo-young (Kim Min-jae 82), Lee Jae-sung, Lee Keun-ho (Lee Seung-gi 82), Kim Shin-wook.
Jamaica: Knight (Paul 82) - Lawrence (Lawes 82), Richie, Fisher, Francis, Devon Williams (Shaw 82), McCarthy, Watson, Morris (Hardware 58), Kelly, East (Foster 58).

Wednesday, January 31
Jan 31 - San Antonio, USA
Mexico 1 (Ayala 65)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Villarreal (USA)
Mexico: Cota - L Rodriguez, Ayala, Alanis (Araujo 46), Gallardo, Molina (J Hernandez 46), G Dos Santos (Aquino 46), Martin (Pizarro 73), Pineda (J Dos Santos 46), Vela, E Hernandez (Gonzalez 57).
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Sehic (Piric 46) - D Todorovic, Graovac, Bekic, Tomic (Besirevic 46), Medunjanin, Loncar, Saric (Secerovic 75), Zakaric (O Todorovic 64), Ahmetovic (Koljic 73), Menalo (Cavar 66). *Sent off: Bekic 83.*

Saturday, February 3
Feb 3 - Antalya, Turkey
Latvia 0
South Korea 1 (Kim Shin-wook 33)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 100. **Ref:** Palabiyik (Tur)
Latvia: Ikstens - Jagodinskis, Freimanis, Kolesovs, Oss, Indrans (Ivanovs 76), Kazacoks (Stuglis 76), Torress (Emsis 64), Hmizs, Jurkovskis, Gauracs (Fjodorovs 46).
South Korea: Kim Seung-gyu - Kim Jin-su (Hong Chul 67), Jung Seung-hyun, Kim Min-jae, Go Yo-han (Kim Tae-hwan 90), Lee Seung-gi (Jin Seong-wook 90), Lee Chan-dong (Son Jun-ho 90), Jung Woo-young (Kim Sung-joon 90), Lee Jae-sung, Lee Keun-ho (Kim Seung-dae 90), Kim Shin-wook.

AFRICAN NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP

(restricted to players with clubs in the domestic championship of the competing countries)
Played in Morocco

Group A
Jan 13: Morocco 4 Mauritania 0.
Jan 14: Guinea 1 Sudan 2.
Jan 17: Morocco 3 Guinea 1; Sudan 1 Mauritania 0.
Jan 21: Sudan 0 Morocco 0; Mauritania 0 Guinea 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Sudan (Q)	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Guinea	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Mauritania	3	0	0	3	0	6	0

Group B
Jan 14: Ivory Coast 0 Namibia 1; Zambia 3 Uganda 1.
Jan 18: Ivory Coast 0 Zambia 2; Uganda 0 Namibia 1.
Jan 22: Namibia 1 Zambia 1; Uganda 0 Ivory Coast 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Namibia (Q)	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Uganda	3	0	1	2	1	4	1
Ivory Coast	3	0	1	2	0	3	1

Group C
Jan 15: Libya 3 Equatorial Guinea 0; Nigeria 0 Rwanda 0.
Jan 19: Libya 0 Nigeria 1; Rwanda 1 Equatorial Guinea 0.
Jan 23: Equatorial Guinea 1 Nigeria 3; Rwanda 0 Libya 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Libya (Q)	3	2	0	1	4	1	6
Rwanda	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Equat Guinea	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

Group D
Jan 16: Angola 0 Burkina Faso 0; Cameroon 0 Congo 1.
Jan 20: Angola 1 Cameroon 0; Congo 2 Burkina Faso 0.
Jan 24: Congo 0 Angola 0; Burkina Faso 1 Cameroon 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Congo (Q)	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Angola (Q)	3	1	2	0	1	0	5
Burkina Faso	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
Cameroon	3	0	1	2	1	3	1

● *Top 2 in groups qualified for quarter-finals*

Quarter-finals
Jan 27: Morocco 2 Namibia 0; Zambia 0 Sudan 1.
Jan 28: Nigeria 2 Angola 1 (aet); Congo 1 Libya 1 (aet, Libya 5-3 on pens).

Semi-finals
Jan 31: Morocco 3 Libya 1 (aet); Sudan 0 Nigeria 1.

3rd-place match
Feb 3: Libya 1 Sudan 1 (Sudan 4-2 on pens).

Final
Feb 4 - Casablanca
Morocco 4 (Hadraf 44, 64, El Karti 61, El Kaabi 73)
Nigeria 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Gassama (Gam)
Sent off: Moses (Nigeria) 48

Club football

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st preliminary round
Jan 16: Bali United (Ins) 3 Tampines Rovers (Sin) 1; Shan United (Mym) 1 Ceres (Phi) 1 (aet, Ceres 4-3 on pens).

2nd preliminary round
Jan 23: Brisbane Roar (Aus) 2 Ceres 3; Chiangrai United (Tha) 2 Bali United 1 (aet); Eastern (HK) 2 FLC Thanh Hoa (Vie) 4; Muangthong United (Tha) 5 Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mly) 2.

Final preliminary round
Jan 30: Al Ain (UAE) 2 Malkiya (Bhn) 0; Al Gharafa (Qat) 2 Pakhtakor (Uzb) 1; Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 3 Muangthong United 0; Nasaf Qarshi (Uzb) 5 Al Faisaly (Jor) 1; Shanghai SIPG (Chn) 1 Chiangrai United 0; Suwon Bluewings (SKo) 5 FLC Thanh Hoa 1; Tianjin Quanjian (Chn) 2 Ceres 0; Zob Ahan (Irn) 3 Aizawl (Ind) 1.

BANGLADESH

2017-18 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Abahani D (C)	22	16	4	2	35	13	52
Sheikh Jamal	22	14	5	3	45	23	47
Abahani Chit	22	13	5	4	27	13	44
Saif	22	11	8	3	30	16	41
Mohammedan	22	9	5	8	31	26	32
Sheikh Russel	22	6	9	7	21	21	27
Brothers Union	22	5	7	10	20	30	22
Arambagh	22	5	6	11	25	35	21
BJMC	22	4	8	10	15	27	20
Rahmatganj	22	3	9	10	19	30	18
Muktijoddha	22	5	3	14	18	33	18
Farashganj (R)	22	4	5	13	16	35	17

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Qualifying stage
Played in Pago Pago, American Samoa
Jan 20: Tupapa Maraerenga (Coo) 1 Lupe Ole Soaga (Soa) 0; Veitongo (Ton) 1 Pago Youth (AmS) 1.
Jan 23: Veitongo 2 Tupapa Maraerenga 9; Pago Youth 1 Lupe Ole Soaga 13.
Jan 26: Lupe Ole Soaga 6 Veitongo 0; Pago Youth 0 Tupapa Maraerenga 5.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tupapa M (Q)	3	3	0	0	15	2	9
L O Soaga (Q)	3	2	0	1	19	2	6
Veitongo	3	0	1	2	3	16	1
Pago Youth	3	0	1	2	2	19	1

● *Top 2 qualified for group stage*

NEW CALEDONIA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Hienghene[2] (C)	22	17	2	3	69	23	73
Magenta	22	14	5	3	57	21	69
Lossi[3]	22	11	4	7	58	39	56
Tiga Sport[5]	22	12	2	8	46	38	54
Mont-Dore[3]	22	10	5	7	51	41	54
Ne Drehu	22	8	5	9	37	45	51
Horizon Patho[8]	22	10	7	5	51	31	48
Wetr[6]	22	7	8	7	41	35	42
AGJP[4]	22	6	5	11	49	62	41
Poindimie[5]	22	5	4	13	39	69	35
Belep[6, 9]	22	6	1	15	35	66	32
Baco[7] (R)	22	1	2	19	28	91	17

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
Deductions for various infringements:
[2]2pts [3]3pts [4]4pts [5]6pts [6]9pts [7]10pts [8]11pts
[9]Enter rel/prom play-offs

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

March 2018 Vol 58 No 7

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PREMIER LEAGUE: 2017-18

ARSENAL

GOALKEEPERS
33 Petr **CECH** (CzR) (35) 20.05.82
54 Matt **MACEY** (23) 09.09.94
13 David **OSPINA** (Col) (29) 31.08.88

DEFENDERS
24 Hector **BELLERIN** (Spa) (22) 19.03.95
21 Calum **CHAMBERS** (23) 20.01.95
16 Rob **HOLDING** (22) 20.09.95
31 Sead **KOLASINAC** (Bos) (24) 20.06.93
6 Laurent **KOSCIELNY** (Fra) (32) 10.09.85
27 Konstantinos **MAVROPANOS** (Gre) (20) 11.12.97
4 Per **MERTESACKER** (Ger) (33) 29.09.84
18 Nacho **MONREAL** (Spa) (31) 26.02.86
20 Shkodran **MUSTAFI** (Ger) (25) 17.04.92

MIDFIELDERS
19 Santi **CAZORLA** (Spa) (33) 13.12.84
35 Mohamed **ELNENY** (Egy) (25) 11.07.92
17 Alex **IWOBI** (Nga) (21) 03.05.96
30 Ainsley **MAITLAND-NILES** (20) 29.08.97
7 Henrikh **MKHITARYAN** (Arm) (29) 21.01.89
61 Reiss **NELSON** (18) 10.12.99
11 Mesut **OZIL** (Ger) (29) 15.10.88
8 Aaron **RAMSEY** (Wal) (27) 26.12.90
10 Jack **WILSHERE** (26) 01.01.92
29 Granit **XHAKA** (Swi) (25) 27.09.92

FORWARDS
14 Pierre-Emerick **AUBAMEYANG** (Gab) (28) 18.06.89
9 Alexandre **LACAZETTE** (Fra) (26) 28.05.91
62 Eddie **NKETIAH** (18) 30.05.99
23 Danny **WELBECK** (27) 26.11.90

MANAGER
Arsene **WENGER** (Fra) (68) 22.10.49

BOURNEMOUTH

GOALKEEPERS
27 Asmir **BEGOVIC** (Bos) (30) 20.06.87
1 Artur **BORUC** (Pol) (38) 20.02.80
32 Adam **FEDERICI** (Aus) (33) 31.01.85

DEFENDERS
5 Nathan **AKE** (Hol) (23) 18.02.95
3 Steve **COOK** (26) 19.04.91
11 Charlie **DANIELS** (31) 07.09.86
2 Simon **FRANCIS** (33) 16.02.85
26 Tyrone **MINGS** (25) 27.02.92
42 Jack **SIMPSON** (21) 08.01.97
15 Adam **SMITH** (26) 29.04.91
14 Brad **SMITH** (Aus) (23) 09.04.94
29 Rhoys **WIGGINS** (Wal) (30) 04.11.87

MIDFIELDERS
8 Harry **ARTER** (Rol) (28) 28.12.89
36 Matt **BUTCHER** (20) 14.05.97
16 Lewis **COOK** (21) 03.02.97
24 Ryan **FRASER** (Sco) (23) 24.02.94
4 Dan **GOSLING** (28) 01.02.90
22 Emerson **HYNDMAN** (USA) (21) 09.04.96
33 Jordon **IBE** (22) 08.12.95
7 Marc **PUGH** (30) 02.04.87
19 Junior **STANISLAS** (28) 26.11.89
6 Andrew **SURMAN** (31) 20.08.86
58 Kyle **TAYLOR** (18) 28.08.99

FORWARDS
18 Jermain **DEFOE** (35) 07.10.82
17 Josh **KING** (Nor) (26) 15.01.92
31 Lys **MOUSSET** (Fra) (22) 08.02.96
13 Callum **WILSON** (25) 27.02.92

MANAGER
Eddie **HOWE** (40) 29.11.77

BRIGHTON

GOALKEEPERS
26 Tim **KRUL** (Hol) (29) 03.04.88
12 Niki **MAENPAA** (Fin) (33) 23.01.85
1 Mat **RYAN** (Aus) (25) 08.04.92

DEFENDERS
3 Gaetan **BONG** (Cam) (29) 25.04.88
2 **BRUNO** (Spa) (37) 01.10.80
22 Shane **DUFFY** (Rol) (26) 01.01.92
5 Lewis **DUNK** (26) 21.11.91
18 Connor **GOLDSON** (25) 18.12.92
4 Uwe **HUNEMEIER** (Ger) (32) 09.01.86
23 Liam **ROSENIOR** (33) 09.07.84
21 Ezequiel **SCHELOTTO** (Ita) (28) 23.05.89
29 Markus **SUTTNER** (Aut) (30) 16.04.87

MIDFIELDERS
13 Pascal **GROSS** (Ger) (26) 15.06.91
19 Jose **IZQUIERDO** (Col) (25) 07.07.92
7 Beram **KAYAL** (Isr) (29) 02.05.88
11 Anthony **KNOCKAERT** (Fra) (26) 20.11.91
49 Jayson **MOLUMBY** (Rol) (18) 06.08.99
20 Solly **MARCH** (23) 20.07.94
24 Davy **PROPPER** (Hol) (26) 02.09.91
14 Steve **SIDWELL** (35) 14.12.82
8 Jiri **SKALAK** (CzR) (25) 12.03.92
6 Dale **STEPHENS** (28) 12.06.89

FORWARDS
9 Sam **BALDOCK** (28) 15.03.89
66 Aaron **CONNOLLY** (Rol) (18) 28.01.00
10 Tomer **HEMED** (Isr) (30) 02.05.87
25 Jurgen **LOCADIA** (Hol) (24) 07.11.93
17 Glenn **MURRAY** (34) 25.09.83
70 James **TILLEY** (19) 13.06.98
16 Leonardo **ULLOA** (Arg) (31) 26.07.86

MANAGER
Chris **HUGHTON** (59) 11.12.58

BURNLEY

GOALKEEPERS
1 Tom **HEATON** (31) 15.04.86
30 Adam **LEGZDINS** (31) 28.11.86
22 Anders **LINDEGAARD** (Den) (33) 13.04.84
29 Nick **POPE** (25) 19.04.92

DEFENDERS
26 Phil **BARDSLEY** (Sco) (32) 28.06.85
28 Kevin **LONG** (Rol) (27) 18.08.90
2 Matthew **LOWTON** (28) 09.06.89
6 Ben **MEE** (28) 21.09.89
5 James **TARKOWSKI** (25) 19.11.92
3 Charlie **TAYLOR** (24) 18.09.93
23 Stephen **WARD** (Rol) (32) 20.08.85

MIDFIELDERS
37 Scott **ARFIELD** (Can) (29) 01.11.88
12 Robbie **BRADY** (Rol) (26) 14.01.92
4 Jack **CORK** (28) 25.06.89
16 Steven **DEFOUR** (Blg) (29) 15.04.88
17 Johann Berg **GUDMUNDSSON** (Ice) (27) 27.10.90
13 Jeff **HENDRICK** (Rol) (26) 31.01.92
43 Bradley **JACKSON** (21) 20.10.96
25 Aaron **LENNON** (30) 16.04.87
8 Dean **MARNEY** (34) 31.01.84
7 Georges-Kevin **N'KOUDOU** (Fra) (23) 13.02.95
41 Aiden **O'NEILL** (Aus) (19) 04.07.98
18 Ashley **WESTWOOD** (27) 01.04.90

FORWARDS
10 Ashley **BARNES** (Aut) (28) 30.10.89
9 Sam **VOKES** (Wal) (28) 21.10.89
19 Jon **WALTERS** (Rol) (34) 20.09.83
21 Nahki **WELLS** (Ber) (27) 01.06.90
11 Chris **WOOD** (NZ) (26) 07.12.91

MANAGER
Sean **DYCHE** (46) 28.06.71

CHELSEA

GOALKEEPERS
1 Willy **CABALLERO** (Arg) (36) 28.09.81
13 Thibaut **COURTOIS** (Blg) (25) 11.05.92
37 **EDUARDO** (Por) (35) 19.09.82

DEFENDERS
3 Marcos **ALONSO** (Spa) (27) 28.12.90
44 Ethan **AMPADU** (Wal) (17) 14.09.00
28 Cesar **AZPILICUETA** (Spa) (28) 28.08.89
24 Gary **CAHILL** (32) 19.12.85
27 Andreas **CHRISTENSEN** (Den) (21) 10.04.96
30 **DAVID LUIZ** (Bra) (30) 22.04.87
33 Emerson **PALMIERI** (Bra) (23) 03.08.94
2 Antonio **RUDIGER** (Ger) (24) 03.03.93
66 Dujon **STERLING** (18) 24.10.99
21 Davide **ZAPPACOSTA** (Ita) (25) 11.06.92

MIDFIELDERS
14 Tiemoue **BAKAYOKO** (Fra) (23) 17.08.94
8 Ross **BARKLEY** (24) 05.12.93
6 Danny **DRINKWATER** (27) 05.03.90
4 Cesc **FABREGAS** (Spa) (30) 04.05.87
70 Callum **HUDSON-ODOI** (17) 07.11.00
7 N'Golo **KANTE** (Fra) (26) 29.03.91
15 Victor **MOSES** (Nga) (27) 12.12.90
36 Kyle **SCOTT** (USA) (20) 12.12.97
22 **WILLIAN** (Bra) (29) 09.08.88

FORWARDS
18 Olivier **GIROUD** (Fra) (31) 30.09.86
10 Eden **HAZARD** (Blg) (27) 07.01.91
9 Alvaro **MORATA** (Spa) (25) 23.10.92
11 **PEDRO** (Spa) (30) 28.07.87

MANAGER
Antonio **CONTE** (Ita) (48) 31.07.69

CRYSTAL PALACE

GOALKEEPERS
13 Wayne **HENNESSEY** (Wal) (31) 24.01.87
30 Dion **HENRY** (20) 12.09.97
1 Julian **SPERONI** (Arg) (38) 18.05.79

DEFENDERS
6 Scott **DANN** (31) 14.02.87
27 Damien **DELANEY** (Rol) (36) 20.07.81
24 Timothy **FOSU-MENSAH** (Hol) (20) 02.01.98
33 Jaroslaw **JACH** (Pol) (24) 17.02.94
34 Martin **KELLY** (27) 27.04.90
35 Michael **PHILLIPS** (20) 22.09.97
44 Jairo **RIEDEWALD** (Hol) (21) 09.09.96
12 Mamadou **SAKHO** (Fra) (28) 13.02.90
15 Jeffrey **SCHLUPP** (Gha) (25) 23.12.92
23 Pape **SOUARE** (Sen) (27) 06.06.90
5 James **TOMKINS** (28) 29.03.89
3 Patrick **VAN AANHOLT** (Hol) (27) 29.08.90
2 Joel **WARD** (28) 29.10.89

MIDFIELDERS
7 Yohan **CABAYE** (Fra) (32) 14.01.86
28 Jason **EYENGA-LOKILO** (Blg) (19) 17.09.98
14 **LEE** Chung-soo (SKo) (29) 02.07.88
8 Ruben **LOFTUS-CHEEK** (22) 23.01.96
18 James **McARTHUR** (Sco) (30) 07.10.87
4 Luka **MILIVOJEVIC** (Ser) (26) 07.04.91
22 Jordon **MUTCH** (26) 02.12.91
42 Jason **PUNCHEON** (31) 26.06.86
31 Erdal **RAKIP** (Swe) (22) 13.02.96
26 Bakary **SAKO** (Mli) (29) 26.04.88
10 Andros **TOWNSEND** (26) 16.07.91
29 Aaron **WAN-BISSAKA** (20) 26.11.97
11 Wilfried **ZAHA** (25) 10.11.92

FORWARDS
17 Christian **BENTEKE** (Blg) (27) 03.12.90
32 Levi **LUMEKA** (19) 05.09.98
9 Alexander **SORLOTH** (Nor) (22) 05.12.95
21 Connor **WICKHAM** (24) 31.03.93

MANAGER
Roy **HODGSON** (70) 09.08.47

EVERTON

GOALKEEPERS
41 Mateusz **HEWELT** (Pol) (21) 23.09.96
1 Jordan **PICKFORD** (23) 07.03.94
33 Joel **ROBLES** (Spa) (27) 17.06.90
22 Maarten **STEKELENBURG** (Hol) (35) 22.09.82

DEFENDERS
3 Leighton **BAINES** (33) 11.12.84
23 Seamus **COLEMAN** (Rol) (29) 11.10.88
25 Ramiro **FUNES MORI** (Arg) (26) 05.03.91
36 Luke **GARBUTT** (24) 21.05.93
30 Mason **HOLGATE** (21) 22.10.96
6 Phil **JAGIELKA** (35) 17.08.82
4 Michael **KEANE** (25) 11.01.93
43 Jonjoe **KENNY** (20) 15.03.97
13 Eliaquim **MANGALA** (Fra) (27) 13.02.91
15 Cuco **MARTINA** (Cur) (28) 25.09.89
5 Ashley **WILLIAMS** (Wal) (33) 23.08.84

MIDFIELDERS
54 Beni **BANINGIME** (DRC) (19) 09.09.98
26 Tom **DAVIES** (19) 30.06.98
17 Idrissa **GUEYE** (Sen) (28) 26.09.89
20 Davy **KLAASSEN** (Hol) (25) 21.02.93
16 James **McCARTHY** (Rol) (27) 12.11.90
2 Morgan **SCHNEIDERLIN** (Fra) (28) 08.11.89
18 Gylfi **SIGURDSSON** (Ice) (28) 08.09.89
27 Nikola **VLASIC** (Cro) (20) 04.10.97

FORWARDS
7 Yannick **BOLASIE** (DRC) (28) 24.05.89
29 Dominic **CALVERT-LEWIN** (20) 16.03.97
19 Oumar **NIASSE** (Sen) (27) 18.04.90
10 Wayne **ROONEY** (32) 24.10.85
14 Cenk **TOSUN** (Tur) (26) 07.06.91
11 Theo **WALCOTT** (28) 16.03.89

MANAGER
Sam **ALLARDYCE** (63) 19.10.54

HUDDERSFIELD

GOALKEEPERS
13 Joel **COLEMAN** (22) 26.09.95
28 Rob **GREEN** (38) 18.01.80
1 Jonas **LOSSL** (Den) (28) 01.02.89

DEFENDERS
33 Florent **HADERGJONAJ** (Swi) (22) 31.07.94
44 Michael **HEFELE** (Ger) (27) 01.09.90
25 Mathias **JORGENSEN** (Den) (27) 23.04.90
5 Terence **KONGOLO** (Hol) (24) 14.02.94
15 Chris **LOWE** (Ger) (28) 16.04.89
3 Scott **MALONE** (26) 25.03.91
26 Christopher **SCHINDLER** (Ger) (27) 29.04.90
2 Tommy **SMITH** (25) 14.04.92
27 Jon **STANKOVIC** (SIn) (21) 14.01.96

MIDFIELDERS
8 Philip **BILLING** (Den) (21) 11.06.96
6 Jonathan **HOGG** (28) 06.12.88
22 Tom **INCE** (25) 30.01.92
10 Aaron **MOOY** (Aus) (27) 15.09.90
39 Lewis **O'BRIEN** (19) 14.10.98
21 Alex **PRITCHARD** (24) 03.05.93
7 Sean **SCANNELL** (Rol) (27) 17.09.90
11 Abdelhamid **SABIRI** (Mor) (20) 28.11.96
17 Rajiv **VAN LA PARRA** (Hol) (26) 04.06.91
4 Dean **WHITEHEAD** (35) 12.01.82
19 Danny **WILLIAMS** (USA) (28) 08.03.89

FORWARDS
20 Laurent **DEPOITRE** (Blg) (28) 07.12.88
9 Elias **KACHUNGA** (DRC) (25) 22.04.92
24 Steve **MOUNIE** (Ben) (23) 29.09.94
23 Collin **QUANER** (Ger) (26) 18.06.91

MANAGER
David **WAGNER** (Ger) (45) 19.10.71

LEICESTER CITY

GOALKEEPERS
12 Ben **HAMER** (30) 20.11.87
17 Eldin **JAKUPOVIC** (Swi) (33) 02.10.84
1 Kasper **SCHMEICHEL** (Den) (31) 05.11.86

DEFENDERS
29 Yohan **BENALOUANE** (Tun) (30) 28.03.87
3 Ben **CHILWELL** (21) 21.12.96
16 Aleksandar **DRAGOVIC** (Aut) (26) 06.03.91
28 Christian **FUCHS** (Aut) (31) 07.04.86
6 Robert **HUTH** (Ger) (33) 18.08.84
34 Josh **KNIGHT** (20) 07.09.97
15 Harry **MAGUIRE** (24) 05.03.93
5 Wes **MORGAN** (Jam) (34) 21.01.84
2 Danny **SIMPSON** (31) 04.01.87

MIDFIELDERS
11 Marc **ALBRIGHTON** (28) 18.11.89
18 Daniel **AMARTEY** (Gha) (23) 21.12.94
32 Harvey **BARNES** (20) 09.12.97
38 Hamza **CHOUDHURY** (20) 01.10.97
7 Demarai **GRAY** (21) 28.06.96
21 Vicente **IBORRA** (Spa) (30) 16.01.88
22 Matty **JAMES** (26) 22.07.91
26 Riyad **MAHREZ** (Alg) (27) 21.02.91
25 Wilfred **NDIDI** (Nga) (21) 16.12.96
14 Adrien **SILVA** (Por) (28) 15.03.89
30 George **THOMAS** (Wal) (20) 24.03.97

FORWARDS
33 Fousseni **DIABATE** (Mli) (22) 18.10.95
8 Kelechi **IHEANACHO** (Nga) (21) 03.10.96
20 Shinji **OKAZAKI** (Jap) (31) 16.04.86
9 Jamie **VARDY** (31) 11.01.87

MANAGER
Claude **PUEL** (Fra) (56) 02.09.61

LIVERPOOL

GOALKEEPERS
34 Adam **BOGDAN** (Hun) (30) 27.09.87
1 Loris **KARIUS** (Ger) (24) 22.06.93
22 Simon **MIGNOLET** (Blg) (29) 06.03.88
52 Danny **WARD** (Wal) (24) 22.06.93

DEFENDERS
66 Trent **ALEXANDER-ARNOLD** (19) 07.10.98
2 Nathaniel **CLYNE** (26) 05.04.91
12 Joe **GOMEZ** (20) 23.05.97
17 Ragnar **KLAVAN** (Est) (32) 30.10.85
6 Dejan **LOVREN** (Cro) (28) 05.07.89
32 Joel **MATIP** (Cam (26) 08.08.91
18 Alberto **MORENO** (Spa) (25) 05.07.92
26 Andrew **ROBERTSON** (Sco) (23) 11.03.94
4 Virgil **VAN DIJK** (Hol) (26) 08.07.91

MIDFIELDERS
23 Emre **CAN** (Ger) (24) 12.01.94
14 Jordan **HENDERSON** (27) 17.06.90
20 Adam **LALLANA** (29) 10.05.88
7 James **MILNER** (32) 04.01.86
21 Alex **OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN** (24) 15.08.93
5 Georginio **WIJNALDUM** (Hol) (27) 11.11.90
58 Ben **WOODBURN** (Wal) (18) 15.10.99

FORWARDS
9 Roberto **FIRMINO** (Bra) (26) 02.10.91
28 Danny **INGS** (25) 23.07.92
19 Sadio **MANE** (Sen) (25) 10.04.92
11 Mohamed **SALAH** (Egy) (25) 15.06.92
29 Dominic **SOLANKE** (20) 14.09.97

MANAGER
Jurgen **KLOPP** (Ger) (50) 16.06.67

MANCHESTER CITY

GOALKEEPERS
1 Claudio **BRAVO** (Chl) (34) 13.04.83
31 **EDERSON** (Bra) (24) 17.08.93

DEFENDERS
24 Tosin **ADARABIOYO** (20) 24.09.97
3 **DANILO** (Bra) (26) 15.07.91
4 Vincent **KOMPANY** (Blg) (31) 10.04.86
14 Aymeric **LAPORTE** (Fra) (23) 27.05.94
22 Benjamin **MENDY** (Fra) (23) 17.07.94
30 Nicolas **OTAMENDI** (Arg) (30) 12.02.88
5 John **STONES** (23) 28.05.94
2 Kyle **WALKER** (27) 28.05.90

MIDFIELDERS
17 Kevin **DE BRUYNE** (Blg) (26) 28.06.91
18 Fabian **DELPH** (28) 21.11.89
55 Brahim **DIAZ** (Spa) (18) 03.08.99
25 **FERNANDINHO** (Bra) (32) 04.05.85
47 Phil **FODEN** (17) 28.05.00
8 Ikay **GUNDOGAN** (Ger) (27) 24.10.90
19 Leroy **SANE** (Ger) (22) 11.01.96
20 Bernardo **SILVA** (Por) (23) 10.08.94
21 David **SILVA** (Spa) (32) 08.01.86
7 Raheem **STERLING** (23) 08.12.94
42 Yaya **TOURE** (IvC) (34) 13.05.83
35 Oleksandr **ZINCHENKO** (Ukr) (21) 15.12.96

FORWARDS
10 Sergio **AGUERO** (Arg) (29) 02.06.88
33 Gabriel **JESUS** (Bra) (20) 03.04.97

MANAGER
Pep **GUARDIOLA** (Spa) (47) 18.01.71

MANCHESTER UTD

GOALKEEPERS
1 David **DE GEA** (Spa) (27) 07.11.90
40 Joel **CASTRO PEREIRA** (Por) (21) 28.06.96
20 Sergio **ROMERO** (Arg) (31) 22.02.87

DEFENDERS
3 Eric **BAILLY** (IvC) (23) 12.04.94
17 Daley **BLIND** (Hol) (27) 09.03.90
43 Cameron **BORTHWICK-JACKSON** (21) 02.02.97
36 Matteo **DARMIAN** (Ita) (28) 02.12.89
4 Phil **JONES** (26) 21.02.92
2 Victor **LINDELOF** (Swe) (23) 17.07.94
5 Marcos **ROJO** (Arg) (27) 20.03.90
23 Luke **SHAW** (22) 12.07.95
12 Chris **SMALLING** (28) 22.11.89
25 Antonio **VALENCIA** (Ecu) (32) 04.08.85

MIDFIELDERS
16 Michael **CARRICK** (36) 28.07.81
27 Marouane **FELLAINI** (Blg) (30) 22.11.87
21 Ander **HERRERA** (Spa) (28) 14.08.89
14 Jesse **LINGARD** (25) 15.12.92
8 Juan **MATA** (Spa) (29) 28.04.88
31 Nemanja **MATIC** (Ser) (29) 01.08.88
39 Scott **McTOMINAY** (21) 08.12.96
6 Paul **POGBA** (Fra) (24) 15.03.93
18 Ashley **YOUNG** (32) 09.07.85

FORWARDS
10 Zlatan **IBRAHIMOVIC** (Swe) (36) 03.10.81
9 Romelu **LUKAKU** (Blg) (24) 13.05.93
11 Anthony **MARTIAL** (Fra) (22) 05.12.95
19 Marcus **RASHFORD** (20) 31.10.97
7 Alexis **SANCHEZ** (Chl) (29) 19.12.88

MANAGER
Jose **MOURINHO** (Por) (55) 26.01.63

NEWCASTLE UTD

GOALKEEPERS
26 Karl **DARLOW** (27) 08.10.90
12 Martin **DUBRAVKA** (Slk) (29) 15.01.89
1 Rob **ELLIOT** (Rol) (31) 30.04.86

DEFENDERS
2 Ciaran **CLARK** (Rol) (28) 26.09.89
3 Paul **DUMMETT** (Wal) (26) 26.09.91
27 Jesus **GAMEZ** (Spa) (32) 10.04.85
25 Massadio **HAIDARA** (Fra) (25) 02.12.92
6 Jamaal **LASCELLES** (24) 11.11.93
20 Florian **LEJEUNE** (Fra) (26) 20.05.91
19 Javier **MANQUILLO** (Spa) (23) 05.05.94
18 Chancel **MBEMBA** (DRC) (23) 08.08.94
22 DeAndre **YEDLIN** (USA) (24) 09.07.93

MIDFIELDERS
30 Christian **ATSU** (Gha) (26) 10.01.92
10 Mohamed **DIAME** (Sen) (30) 14.06.87
14 Isaac **HAYDEN** (22) 22.03.95
15 **KENEDY** (Bra) (22) 08.02.96
23 Mikel **MERINO** (Spa) (21) 22.06.96
7 Jacob **MURPHY** (22) 24.02.95
11 Matt **RITCHIE** (Sco) (28) 10.09.89
8 Jonjo **SHELVEY** (25) 27.02.92

FORWARDS
9 Dwight **GAYLE** (28) 17.10.89
21 **JOSELU** (Spa) (27) 27.03.90
17 Ayoze **PEREZ** (Spa) (24) 29.07.93
13 Islam **SLIMANI** (Alg) (29) 18.06.88

MANAGER
Rafael **BENITEZ** (Spa) (57) 16.04.60

SOUTHAMPTON

GOALKEEPERS
44 Fraser **FORSTER** (29) 17.03.88
13 Alex **McCARTHY** (28) 03.12.89
28 Stuart **TAYLOR** (37) 28.11.80

DEFENDERS
35 Jan **BEDNAREK** (Pol) (21) 12.04.96
21 Ryan **BERTRAND** (28) 05.08.89
25 Florin **GARDOS** (Rom) (29) 19.10.88
6 Wesley **HOEDT** (Hol) (23) 06.03.94
38 Sam **McQUEEN** (23) 06.02.95
26 Jeremy **PIED** (Fra) (29) 23.02.89
2 Cedric **SOARES** (Por) (26) 31.08.91
5 Jack **STEPHENS** (23) 27.01.94
3 Maya **YOSHIDA** (Jap) (29) 24.08.88

MIDFIELDERS
19 Sofiane **BOUFAL** (Mor) (24) 17.09.93
8 Steven **DAVIS** (NI) (33) 01.01.85
42 Jake **HESKETH** (21) 27.03.96
23 Pierre-Emile **HOJBJERG** (Den) (22) 05.08.95
18 Mario **LEMINA** (Gab) (24) 01.09.93
22 Nathan **REDMOND** (23) 06.03.94
14 Oriol **ROMEU** (Spa) (26) 24.09.91
39 Josh **SIMS** (20) 28.03.97
11 Dusan **TADIC** (Ser) (29) 20.11.88
16 James **WARD-PROWSE** (23) 01.11.94

FORWARDS
10 Charlie **AUSTIN** (28) 05.07.89
9 Guido **CARRILLO** (Arg) (26) 25.05.91
20 Manolo **GABBIADINI** (Ita) (26) 26.11.91
7 Shane **LONG** (Rol) (31) 22.01.87
61 Michael **OBAFEMI** (Rol) (17) 06.07.00

MANAGER
Mauricio **PELLEGRINO** (Arg) (46) 05.10.71

STOKE CITY

GOALKEEPERS
1 Jack **BUTLAND** (24) 10.03.93
33 Lee **GRANT** (35) 27.01.83
29 Jakob **HAUGAARD** (Den) (25) 01.05.92

DEFENDERS
2 Moritz **BAUER** (Aut) (26) 25.01.92
20 Geoff **CAMERON** (USA) (32) 11.07.85
42 Tom **EDWARDS** (19) 22.01.99
8 Glen **JOHNSON** (33) 23.08.84
15 Bruno **MARTINS INDI** (Hol) (26) 08.02.92
3 Erik **PIETERS** (Hol) (29) 07.08.88
17 Ryan **SHAWCROSS** (30) 04.10.87
21 Kostas **STAFYLIDIS** (Gre) (24) 02.12.93
5 Kevin **WIMMER** (Aut) (25) 15.11.92
6 Kurt **ZOUMA** (Fra) (23) 27.10.94

MIDFIELDERS
16 Charlie **ADAM** (Sco) (32) 10.12.85
14 Ibrahim **AFELLAY** (Hol) (31) 02.04.86
4 Joe **ALLEN** (Wal) (27) 14.03.90
24 Darren **FLETCHER** (Sco) (34) 01.02.84
27 Badou **NDIAYE** (Sen) (27) 27.10.90
7 Stephen **IRELAND** (Rol) (31) 22.08.86
22 Xherdan **SHAQIRI** (Swi) (26) 10.10.91
32 Ramadan **SOBHI** (Egy) (20) 27.06.97

FORWARDS
9 Saido **BERAHINO** (24) 04.08.93
10 Eric **MAXIM CHOUPO-MOTING** (Cam) (28) 23.03.89
25 Peter **CROUCH** (37) 30.01.81
18 Mame Biram **DIOUF** (Sen) (30) 16.12.87
11 **JESE** (Spa) (24) 26.02.93

MANAGER
Paul **LAMBERT** (Sco) (48) 07.08.69

SWANSEA (Wal)

GOALKEEPERS
1 Lukasz **FABIANSKI** (Pol) (32) 18.04.85
25 Erwin **MULDER** (Hol) (28) 03.03.89
13 Kristoffer **NORDFELDT** (Swe) (28) 23.06.89

DEFENDERS
27 Kyle **BARTLEY** (26) 22.05.91
33 Federico **FERNANDEZ** (Arg) (29) 21.02.89
6 Alfie **MAWSON** (24) 19.01.94
26 Kyle **NAUGHTON** (29) 11.11.88
16 Martin **OLSSON** (Swe) (29) 17.05.88
22 Angel **RANGEL** (Spa) (36) 28.01.82
52 Connor **ROBERTS** (Wal) (22) 23.09.95
5 Mike **VAN DER HOORN** (Hol) (25) 15.10.92

MIDFIELDERS
7 Leon **BRITTON** (35) 10.09.82
14 Tom **CARROLL** (25) 28.05.92
17 Sam **CLUCAS** (27) 25.09.90
12 Nathan **DYER** (30) 29.11.87
8 Leroy **FER** (Hol) (28) 05.01.90
42 Dan **JAMES** (Wal) (20) 10.11.97
4 **KI** Sung-yueng (SKo) (29) 24.01.89
24 Andy **KING** (Wal) (29) 29.10.88
38 Adnan **MARIC** (Swe) (21) 17.02.97
15 Wayne **ROUTLEDGE** (33) 07.01.85
35 Renato **SANCHES** (Por) (20) 18.08.97

FORWARDS
10 Tammy **ABRAHAM** (20) 02.10.97
19 Andre **AYEW** (Gha) (28) 17.12.89
18 Jordan **AYEW** (Gha) (26) 11.09.91
2 Wilfried **BONY** (IvC) (29) 10.12.88
11 Luciano **NARSINGH** (Hol) (27) 13.09.90

MANAGER
Carlos **CARVALHAL** (Por) (52) 04.12.65

TOTTENHAM

GOALKEEPERS
1 Hugo **LLORIS** (Fra) (31) 26.12.86
22 Paulo **GAZZANIGA** (Arg) (26) 02.01.92
13 Michel **VORM** (Hol) (34) 20.10.83
41 Alfie **WHITEMAN** (19) 02.10.98

DEFENDERS
4 Toby **ALDERWEIRELD** (Blg) (28) 02.03.89
24 Serge **AURIER** (IvC) (25) 24.12.92
33 Ben **DAVIES** (Wal) (24) 24.04.93
21 Juan **FOYTH** (Arg) (20) 12.01.98
3 Danny **ROSE** (27) 02.07.90
6 Davinson **SANCHEZ** (Col) (21) 12.06.96
2 Keiran **TRIPPIER** (27) 19.09.90
5 Jan **VERTONGHEN** (Blg) (30) 24.04.87
37 Kyle **WALKER-PETERS** (20) 13.04.97

MIDFIELDERS
20 Delle **ALLI** (21) 11.04.96
19 Mousa **DEMBELE** (Blg) (30) 16.07.87
15 Eric **DIER** (24) 15.01.94
23 Christian **ERIKSEN** (Den) (26) 14.02.92
11 Erik **LAMELA** (Arg) (25) 04.03.92
27 Lucas **MOURA** I(Bra) (25) 13.08.92
46 Tashan **OAKLEY-BOOTHE** (17) 14.02.00
17 Moussa **SISSOKO** (Fra) (28) 16.08.89
12 Victor **WANYAMA** (Ken) (26) 25.06.91
29 Harry **WINKS** (22) 02.02.96

FORWARDS
10 Harry **KANE** (24) 28.07.93
18 Fernando **LLORENTE** (Spa) (32) 26.02.85
7 **SON** Heung-min (SKo) (25) 08.07.92

MANAGER
Mauricio **POCHETTINO** (Arg) (45) 02.03.72

WATFORD

GOALKEEPERS
35 Daniel **BACHMANN** (Aut) (23) 09.07.94
1 Heurelho **GOMES** (Bra) (37) 15.02.81
30 Orestis **KARNEZIS** (Gre) (32) 11.07.85

DEFENDERS
3 Miguel **BRITOS** (Uru) (32) 17.07.85
15 Craig **CATHCART** (NI) (29) 06.02.89
21 Kiko **FEMENIA** (Spa) (27) 02.02.91
31 Tommie **HOBAN** (Rol) (24) 24.01.94
25 Jose **HOLEBAS** (Gre) (33) 27.06.84
2 Daryl **JANMAAT** (Hol) (28) 22.07.89
27 Christian **KABASELE** (Blg) (26) 24.02.91
4 Younes **KABOUL** (Fra) (32) 04.01.86
6 Adrian **MARIAPPA** (Jam) (31) 03.10.86
5 Sebastian **PRODL** (Aut) (30) 21.06.87
13 Molla **WAGUE** (Mli) (27) 21.02.91
22 Marvin **ZEEGELAAR** (Hol) (27) 12.08.90

MIDFIELDERS
29 Etienne **CAPOUE** (Fra) (29) 11.07.88
28 Andre **CARRILLO** (Per) (26) 14.06.91
14 Nathaniel **CHALOBAH** (23) 12.12.94
8 Tom **CLEVERLEY** (28) 12.08.89
16 Abdoulaye **DOUCOURE** (Fra) (25) 01.01.93
19 Will **HUGHES** (22) 17.04.95
20 Dodi **LUKEBAKIO** (Blg) (20) 24.09.97
12 Didier **NDONG** (Gab) (23) 17.06.94
37 Roberto **PEREYRA** (Arg) (27) 07.01.91

FORWARDS
9 Troy **DEENEY** (29) 29.06.88
7 Gerard **DEULOFEU** (Spa) (24) 13.03.94
18 Andre **GRAY** (26) 26.06.91
33 Stefano **OKAKA** (Ita) (28) 09.08.89
11 **RICHARLISON** (Bra) (20) 10.05.97
17 Jerome **SINCLAIR** (21) 20.09.96

MANAGER
Javi **GRACIA** (Spa) (47) 01.05.70

WEST BROM

GOALKEEPERS
1 Ben **FOSTER** (34) 03.04.83
13 Boaz **MYHILL** (Wal) (35) 09.11.82
40 Alex **PALMER** (21) 10.08.96

DEFENDERS
25 Craig **DAWSON** (27) 06.05.90
6 Jonny **EVANS** (NI) (30) 03.01.88
16 Ali **GABR** (Egy) (31) 10.01.87
3 Kieran **GIBBS** (28) 26.09.89
26 Ahmed **HEGAZY** (Egy) (27) 25.01.91
23 Gareth **McAULEY** (NI) (38) 05.12.79
2 Allan **NYOM** (Cam) (29) 10.05.88

MIDFIELDERS
18 Gareth **BARRY** (37) 23.02.81
11 Chris **BRUNT** (NI) (33) 14.12.84
17 Oliver **BURKE** (Sco) (20) 07.04.97
22 Nacer **CHADLI** (Blg) (28) 02.08.89
28 Sam **FIELD** (19) 08.05.98
34 Rekeem **HARPER** (17) 08.03.00
20 Grzegorz **KRYCHOWIAK** (Pol) (28) 29.01.90
8 Jake **LIVERMORE** (28) 14.11.89
14 James **McCLEAN** (Rol) (28) 22.04.89
7 James **MORRISON** (Sco) (31) 25.05.86
10 Matt **PHILLIPS** (Sco) (26) 13.03.91
5 Claudio **YACOB** (Arg) (30) 18.07.87

FORWARDS
45 Jonathan **LEKO** (18) 24.04.99
4 Hal **ROBSON-KANU** (Wal) (28) 21.05.89
19 Jay **RODRIGUEZ** (28) 29.07.89
9 Salomon **RONDON** (Ven) (28) 16.09.89
15 Daniel **STURRIDGE** (28) 01.09.89

MANAGER
Alan **PARDEW** (56) 18.07.61

WEST HAM UTD

GOALKEEPERS
13 **ADRIAN** (Spa) (31) 03.01.87
25 Joe **HART** (30) 19.04.87
34 Nathan **TROTT** (19) 21.11.98

DEFENDERS
22 Sam **BYRAM** (24) 16.09.93
19 James **COLLINS** (Wal) (34) 23.08.83
3 Aaron **CRESSWELL** (28) 05.12.89
27 Patrice **EVRA** (Fra) (36) 15.05.81
4 Jose **FONTE** (Por) (34) 22.12.83
26 Arthur **MASUAKU** (Fra) (24) 07.11.93
21 Angelo **OGBONNA** (Ita) (29) 23.05.88
2 Winston **REID** (NZ) (29) 03.07.88
41 Declan **RICE** (Rol) (19) 14.01.99
5 Pablo **ZABALETA** (Arg) (33) 16.01.85

MIDFIELDERS
30 Michail **ANTONIO** (27) 28.03.90
33 Josh **CULLEN** (Rol) (21) 07.04.96
31 Edimilson **FERNANDES** (Swi) (21) 15.04.96
37 Nathan **HOLLAND** (19) 19.06.98
23 Sead **HAKSABANOVIC** (Mne) (18) 04.05.99
8 Cheikhou **KOUYATE** (Sen) (28) 21.12.89
10 Manuel **LANZINI** (Arg) (25) 15.02.93
18 **JOAO MARIO** (Por) (25) 19.01.93
16 Mark **NOBLE** (30) 08.05.87
14 Pedro **OBIANG** (Spa) (25) 27.03.92
36 Domingos **QUINA** (Por) (18) 18.11.99

FORWARDS
7 Marko **ARNAUTOVIC** (Aut) (28) 19.04.89
9 Andy **CARROLL** (29) 06.01.89
17 Javier **HERNANDEZ** (Mex) (29) 01.06.88
12 Jordan **HUGILL** (25) 04.06.92

MANAGER
David **MOYES** (Sco) (54) 25.04.63

(Age as of 23.02.18)

Empty...Zamalek (in white) and Al Ahly line up before January's game

AL AHLY v ZAMALEK

The Cairo derby is one of the most violent in the world

In January, a mere 500 invited spectators witnessed Al Ahly beat Zamalek 3-0 in a fixture that regularly saw crowds of 120,000 cram into Cairo's International Stadium as the Egyptian capital came to a standstill. However, past violent clashes and the country's political upheaval of late have resulted in the fixture being moved away from the city, played behind closed doors and even cancelled altogether.

Football arrived in Egypt during British rule in the 1900s and the derby has always been a focal point for political dissent.

Founded in 1909, Al Ahly represented the country's desire for independence, while Zamalek, who were formed two years later, were the club of the city's wealthy elite, bringing Egyptians and Europeans together – as one of their early names, Al Mukhatalat ("Mixed"), suggests.

By the time the Egyptian Premier League began in 1948, Mukhatalat had changed their name to King Farouk club, after the country's monarch. But when he was deposed in 1952, the country's new ruler, General Nasser, was appointed president of Al Ahly. The league was suspended and their rivals were forced to change their name, choosing Zamalek.

These days non-Egyptians have to officiate the game.

After taking charge of the Cairo derby, Scottish referee Hugh Dallas, who is a veteran of Rangers-Celtic clashes in Glasgow, said: "You just don't realise quite how big it is until you see it for yourself.

"I've done 14 or 15 Old Firm matches and even they don't come close. I genuinely believe that this is as big as it gets." WS

Passion...Al Ahly supporters get behind their team

ON BOTH SIDES

ESSAM EL HADARY	TAREK EL SAID	HOSSAM HASSAN	SABRI RAHEEL	MOAMEN ZAKARIA
● 1996-2008	● 1998-2001 & 2002-06	● 1985-90 & 92-99	● 2009-13	● 2013-15 (on loan)
● 2010-11	● 2006-08	● 2000-04 & 09-11 (coach) & 14 (coach)	● 2013-present	● 2015-present

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1966 Mar 18
A controversial penalty sees the game abandoned when a riot erupts, leading to 300 people being injured and a local factory burned down. The league did not restart properly again for five years.

1999 Apr 9
Zamalek walk off the pitch and the game is abandoned after French referee Mark Batta sends off one of their players, Ayman Abdel Aziz, just four minutes after kick-off.

2001 Mar 2
Playing against his former club for the first time, Ahly and Egypt legend Hossam Hassan scores twice for Zamalek as they win 3-1.

2007 Jul 2
Inspired by Mohamed Aboutrika, Al Ahly come from behind three times in the Egyptian Cup Final to win 4-3 in extra-time.

2012 Jul 22
Al Ahly win 1-0 in a group-stage game on their way to winning the Champions League. They have now been African champions eight times compared to Zamalek's five.

NEXT MONTH ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 23

"Art of Football bring out
the beauty in the game's most
memorable moments" Copa90

"Art of Football capture classic
moments in a vibrant,
contemporary style" The Guardian

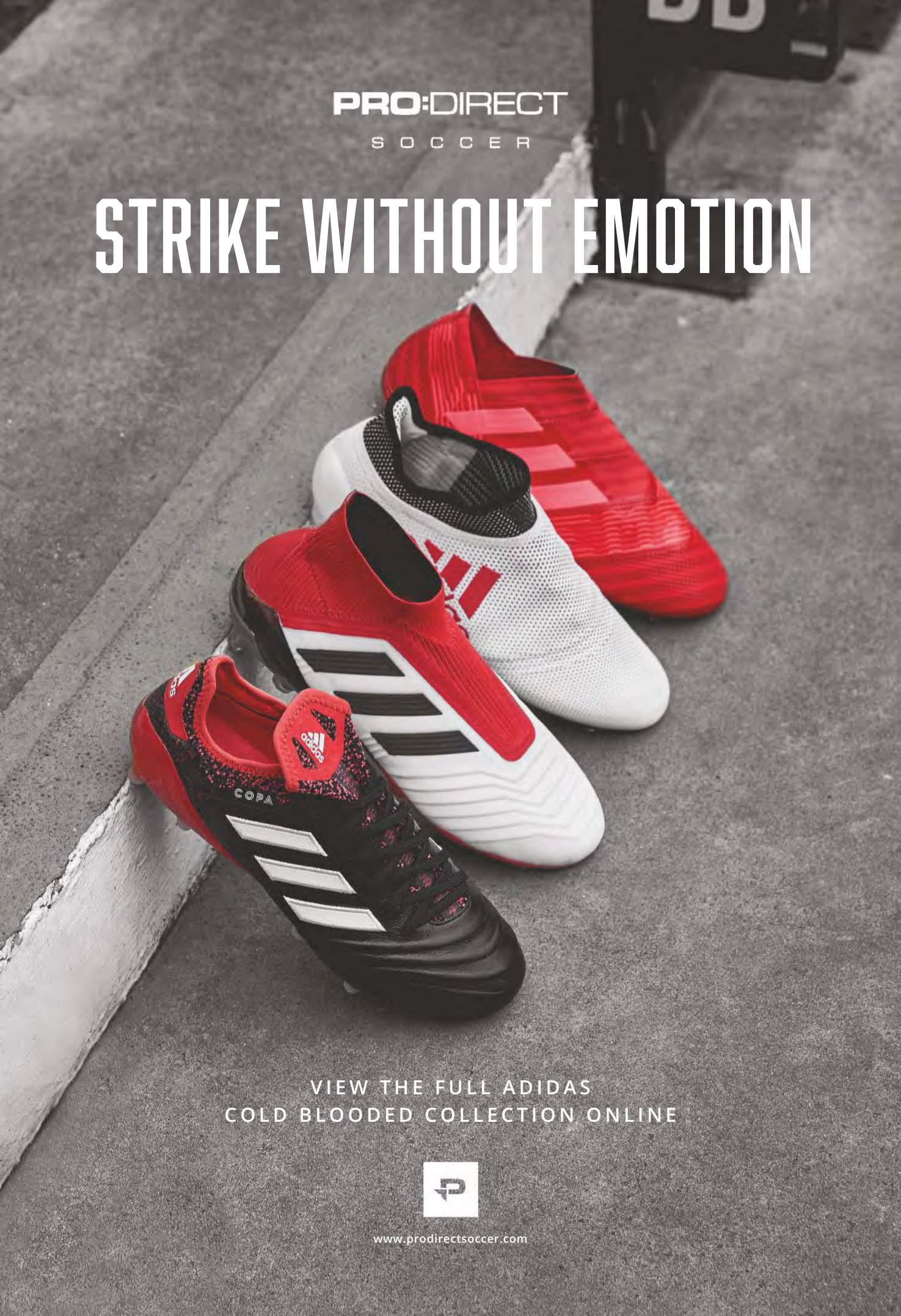
"Art of Football get it.
those split-second moments
are treasured memories and their
artwork captures them in a
classy and stylish way" Ball Street

"Art of Football's shirts capture
the vibrancy of the game
like no other" Dirty Tackle

"Art of Football - where the
beautiful game comes to life"
Hitesh Ratna, Editor, FourFourTwo

"The Art of Football team create
truly unique and authentic content
that is designed to emotionally connect
real fans to the biggest moments
in the game" Adidas Uk

Art-of-football.com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